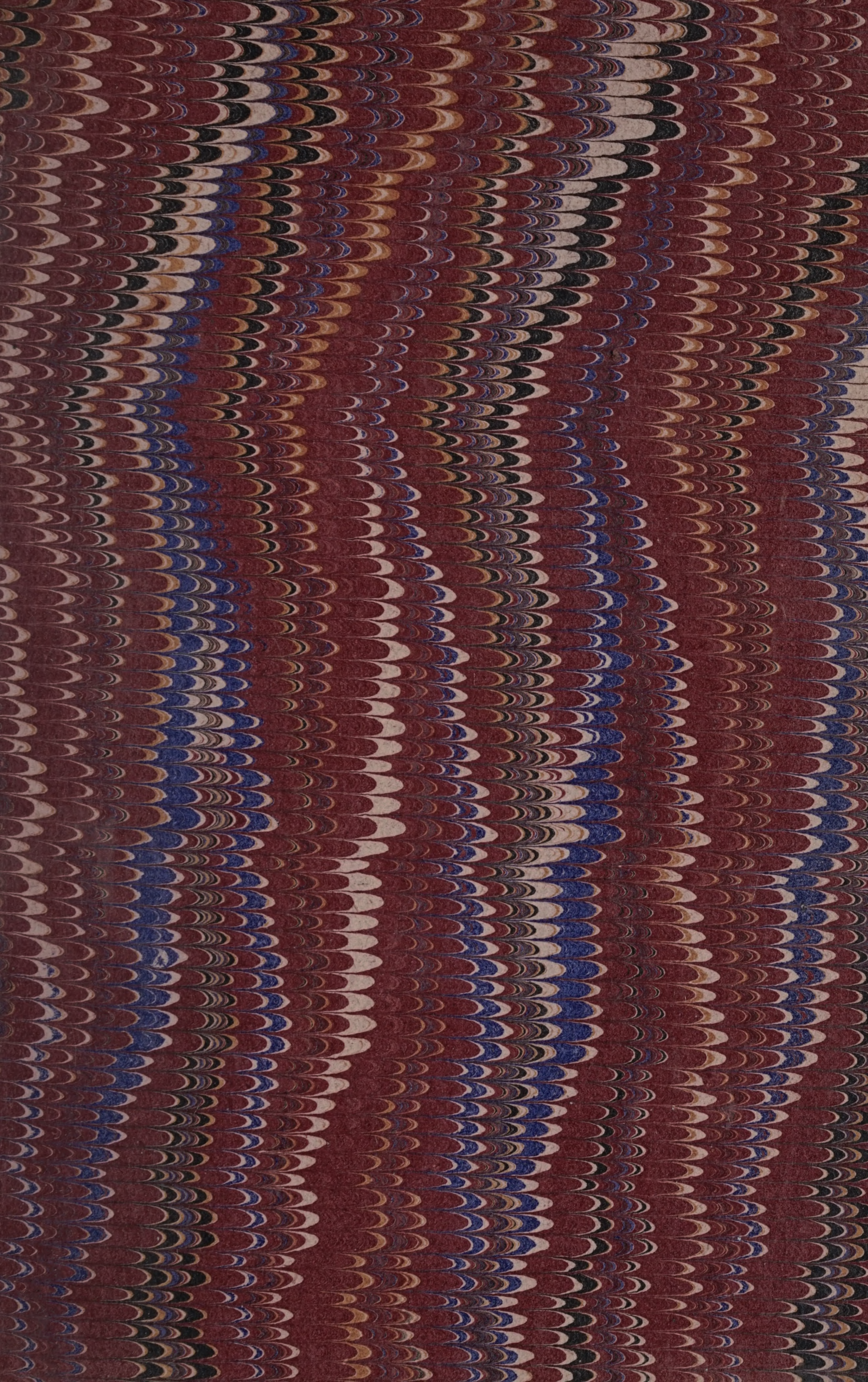


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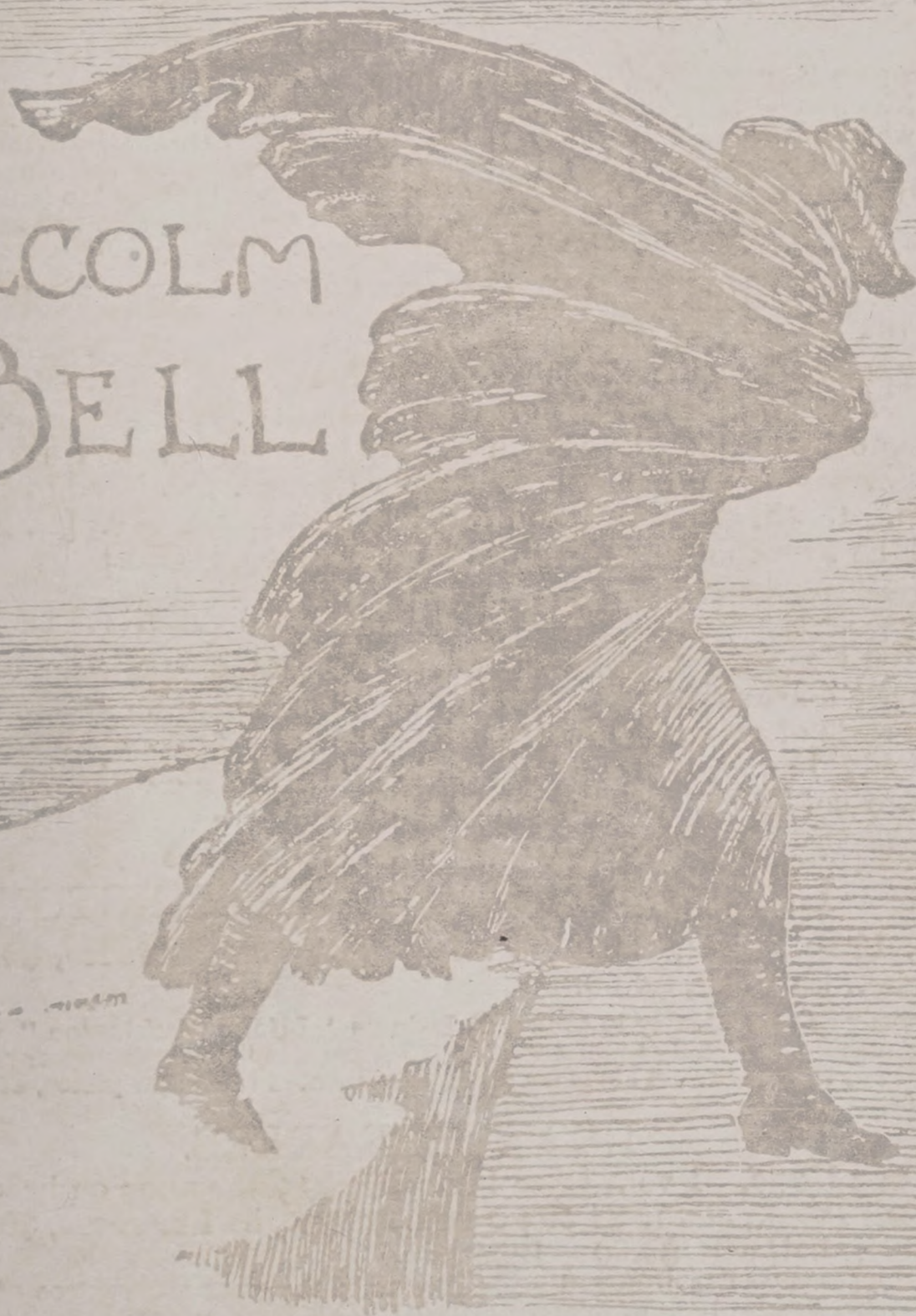
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HIS FATAL SUCCESS

By

MALCOLM
BELL



BELFORD, CLARKE & CO., Publishers, Chicago, New York and San Francisco.

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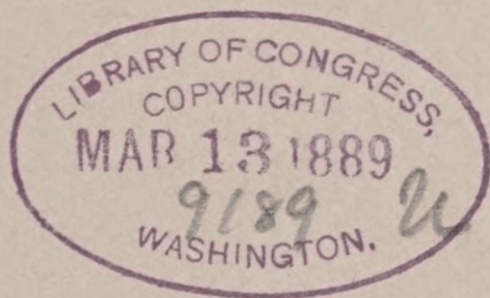
HIS FATAL SUCCESS

BEING

THE STRANGE ADVENTURE OF JOHN STUART

WITH A PROLOGUE BY THE EDITOR

35-
MALCOLM [✓]BELL
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BELFORD, CLARKE & CO.,
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HIS FATAL SUCCESS.

THE PROLOGUE.

CHAPTER I.

THE LOCKED DOOR.

I HAD already for some eighteen months occupied the humble position of clerk to the Wickworth and County Bank, when in March, 1852, owing to the rapidly increasing business of the concern, the late John Stuart was engaged and came to share, and in part relieve, my labors.

He was, as his name may lead some to suspect, a Scotchman, though neither his appearance nor his speech betrayed the fact; five and twenty years of age; strong, good-looking, and healthy; of pleasing manners and lively spirits; consequently, rubbing shoulders, as we were daily at our desks in the dismal and ill-ventilated little tank which at that time was dignified by the title of Clerks' room, we soon became firm friends. We swapped confidences in the intervals of our work by day, and, after hours, shared in the simple and somewhat limited amusements which Wickworth and the surrounding countryside afforded.

I endeavored early in our acquaintance to persuade him to take rooms in the same house in which I myself resided, but to this proposal he always offered a firm, though kindly opposition.

He had rooms in a large old-fashioned house standing at the foot of the hill, just on the outskirts of the town. The place seemed to me to be dismal, and his two rooms with their heavy, old oak furniture, unutterably depressing, but he professed to like them, and always founded his objections to join me on this preference, in spite of my half-joking insistence that he had other reasons.

Indeed, notwithstanding our real friendliness, there was always a barrier of reserve in him beyond which I found it impossible to penetrate, and against which the wings of my friendship long beat in vain.

He would enlarge upon many subjects with the utmost freedom, displaying the keen intelligence and solid sense so common to his nation, but others he would invariably carefully avoid, or only lightly touch upon. Among those which he resolutely refused to discuss were the power of second-sight, claimed by some of his countrymen, the appearance of spectres, wraiths, and warning spirits; in short the whole mass of ghost lore with which Scotland abounds. All attempts of mine to draw him into an argument on these, or similar matters were met by a shrug of the shoulders, or a cheery laugh, and I never could extract from him even the broadest opinions of assent or dissent. His mind, so open to me in most things, was here a sealed book.

On January the first, 1853, we had a holiday at the

bank. There was a fine frost, but Stuart pleaded private business as an excuse for not accompanying me out skating, offering, however, to be at my disposal, if I liked, in the evening. I was the more anxious to induce him to devote the day to outdoor exercise as I had remarked of late with considerable distress, a serious falling off in his health and spirits. He had become terribly thin, and seemed to have lost all appetite, while mentally he was depressed, and given to unwonted fits of abstraction; answering when spoken to, either not at all, or at random. He maintained, however, that he was perfectly well, and obstinately refused to consult a doctor, not indeed without some show of temper, if I was too persistent.

I regretted all day that I had not insisted upon his coming with me, as I skimmed over the smooth surface of the lake, while the shouts and laughter of other skaters rang clear through the bright cold air. I pitied him shut up in his dreary room, and about eight o'clock I set off, determined to drag him out for a brisk walk in the bright moonlight which flooded the quaint old town.

My surprise was great when, on my asking for him, his landlady assured me that he was out.

"Out!" I cried. "But I had an appointment with him here at eight."

"I'm very sorry, sir, but he's out," she repeated.

There seemed to me, at the time, an air of constraint and hesitation about her which I thought strange.

"Very well," I said, "I'll go in and wait for him."

"But, sir," she exclaimed, with a catch in her

breath which sounded almost like a sob, "you can't."

"Can't! Why not?"

"Because, sir, his door is locked, and—" she went on, suddenly bursting into tears. "I don't like it, sir, at all."

The woman's manner and her sudden flood of tears puzzled and alarmed me, but I thought she had perhaps been drinking, and I answered her somewhat roughly, I am afraid.

"Nonsense. Don't like it! Why not? Doesn't he usually lock his door?"

"Never did such a thing before, sir; and he's been out all day."

"By George!" I exclaimed, in a burst of indignation. "What a shame, and he told me he should be at home all day, hard at work."

"Ah!" said the woman, quickly, "did he say that?" And then fell again to weeping and wringing her hands, crying—"What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?"

"Look here!" I said, harshly. "What is the meaning of all this? When did he go out?"

"I don't know, sir," she answered, earnestly. "Indeed, I don't know."

"Did he come in last night?"

"Yes, sir, he came in last night."

In fact, I remembered parting with him at his door.

"Did he go out again?"

"He might have, sir; but I went to bed early, and didn't hear him. I knocked at his door at eight this morning, but there was no answer, and as I knew he had a holiday to-day, I thought maybe he wished

to sleep a bit longer, and so went away. I went again at nine, and again at ten, and still no answer to my knocking, nor sign nor sound from within. I don't half like it, sir ; indeed I don't half like it."

I was perplexed and doubtful how to act in the matter. On the one hand, the woman's uneasiness was undoubtedly genuine ; on the other, to break into his rooms would create a disturbance which might throw an undesired light on some escapade which he wished to keep quiet. And yet he had always appeared to be particularly steady and sedate.

I proposed, finally, to go myself and knock at his door, to which the old woman gladly assented. I had a heavy oak stick in my hand with which, after having first knocked gently several times, I thundered continuously on the door for over five minutes. The echoes rolled along the stone-paved passage and answered dully from within, but when I ceased not a sound came to break the silence, save the quick, broken breathing of the woman at my elbow.

"You see, sir," she whispered, awfully.

"He is certainly not inside," I answered. "That knocking would wake the dead."

She gave a little cry of terror as I said the word, and turned as white as the wall behind her.

"Oh, don't say that, sir," she murmured. "Don't'ee say that."

"Come !" I said, pulling myself together, for the old creature's chill horror was beginning to infect me in spite of myself. "I dare say it's all right. He's off on the lark somewhere, and will turn up all safe to-night. If not——"

"If not, sir," she said, catching quickly at my pause.

"If not, I'll come round to-morrow at twelve and investigate. Good-night."

And I went out into the cold night air, considerably more disturbed than I cared to show, leaving the old woman shivering and trembling on the doorstep. As I turned at the gate to look back, a sudden gust of wind blew out the candle she was endeavoring to shield with her shaking hands, and, with a gasping cry, she turned and fled into the darkened doorway.

I was at my desk at the usual hour next morning, but ten o'clock struck and then eleven, and still John Stuart did not appear. He was, as a rule, punctuality and regularity itself, and, beginning to be seriously alarmed, I was on the point of going to speak to the manager, when the door opened and that functionary himself entered.

"Hulloa!" he exclaimed, casting a sharp glance round the room, "where is Stuart?"

"Not here, sir," I replied.

"Not here! but that won't do. I shall have to report him."

"Can I speak to you for a minute, Mr. Barwell?" I said, with some hesitation.

He looked up at me suddenly and grunted assent. In a few words I told him the whole of my last night's interview, dwelling particularly on the landlady's anxiety and distress. As I spoke his face grew graver and more grave.

“Humph,” he said, when I had finished. “What do you think of it?”

“Really, sir,” I replied, “I don’t know what to think. It seems to me queer.”

“Queer,” he repeated, thoughtfully. “Ah! that’s the word. Queer, queer,” and he went on for some time unconsciously muttering, “queer—queer—queer.”

A pause ensued, during which he stood, evidently in deep deliberation, his brows bent, his eyes fixed on the ground, the fingers of his left hand twisting and untwisting his watch chain, while with the right he slowly rubbed the back of his head up and down, still murmuring:

“That’s the word queer—queer.”

Suddenly he spoke out, as a man who has settled a difficult problem, and fully made up his mind to a course of action.

“Take your hat and run down and inquire. And look here—” he called after me, as I was leaving the room, “call in at the police-office on your way, and get a man to go with you. If you can’t get any answer to your knocking, break the door in. I will take the responsibility.”

I did not waste much time in getting to the police-station and securing the services of a constable, and a man with a crowbar. Thus equipped, we started for Stuart’s lodging, followed by an ever increasing crowd of boys and loafers, who were attracted by the uniform and business-like air of the constable. Arrived at the house, he motioned to me and the man with the crowbar to precede him, and then quick-

ly following, he promptly closed and locked the gate behind him, leaving the crowd outside gaping, groaning, jeering, and giving other unmistakable signs of intense dissatisfaction.

The landlady speedily answered our hasty summons, and turned, I thought, a trifle paler at the sight of the policeman ; but I attributed this either to my own imagination, or to the awe which simple people naturally feel at the sight of a member of the force.

“ Now, then,” said he bluntly, “ what’s the meaning of all this here ? ”

The woman trembled, and looked anxious, but she told her story straight-forwardly and well. Stuart had not come home, and her knocking that morning had again been unproductive of any response. She had made up her mind to wait until twelve, and, if I did not appear, to go at once, and report the matter to the police.

“ Ah ! ” said the officer, looking narrowly at her for a moment. “ When was he last seen ? ”

“ About half-past ten, the night before last.”

“ Oh ! ” he repeated ponderously. “ About half-past ten the night before last. And in whose company, if any ? ”

The woman hesitated for an instant.

“ Be careful now,” he continued sharply. “ What you say will be used in—I mean it’s of the first importance.”

“ In the company of this gentleman,” she said, with a deprecatory glance at me.

“ Oh ! ” he exclaimed, wheeling round, and staring at me in what I thought a most offensive manner.

“In the company of this gentleman. In—deed. Where?”

“At the front gate.”

“Did this gentleman happen to come in?”

“No,” I began, but he stopped me with a ridiculous mixture of mystery and pomposity.

“Hush!” he said, let this lady give her evidence unaided, if you please.”

I was about to protest indignantly against his assumption that I was prompting the old woman, but, on second thoughts, I held my tongue.

“No,” she said, “he came in by himself, and did not, as far as I know, go out again.”

“Ah!” replied the intelligent officer thoughtfully, taking off his hat, and wiping his forehead with a handkerchief of startling redness. “As far as you know.”

He intended to convey a world of hidden meaning, as he slowly let fall these words one by one, and paused, laborously endeavoring to look as if he was thinking.

“And now,” he said at length, “let’s have a look at the room.”

“You’ll have to break in then,” she answered, “For he has got the key.”

“Well if we must, we must,” was the profound reply.

We adjourned in a body to the door, and the constable, drawing his staff, knocked three times with it, exclaiming each time solemnly:

“Open in the name of the law.”

As was of course certain, there was no answer, and

after a moment he turned to the man with the crow-bar, saying in a dignified way :

“ The formalities is satisfied. Bust 'im in.”

The door was stout and well fitted, so it was some time before he could force the thin end of the instrument between the jamb and it. He succeeded at last, and bore on it until the veins swelled in his forehead, and his face grew red and moist, but the door stood firm as a rock. Attempts at the upper and lower corners met with the same resistance.

“ Bolted top and bottom,” he said briefly, “ we must try the hinges.”

Here his efforts were more successful. The door plainly yielded, and after a good deal of hard straining on his part, and much impatient and useless advice on the part of the policeman, the hinges suddenly gave, and the door fell inwards with a crash.

The room inside was as black as night.

This was evidently unforeseen by the constable, who had not observed from outside, as I had at once, that the shutters were closed. He was apparently somewhat unwilling to enter, and I was about to do so, when he stopped me abruptly.

“ Fetch a candle,” he said to the landlady. “ No one sets foot in this 'ere room until I have completed my survey.”

He stood in the middle of the room, holding up the candle, and throwing a light all round which illuminated every corner. The furniture was in its usual order, the table littered with books and papers, but not a sign of Stuart, so putting the candle on the table he proceeded to take elaborate notes.

“Now,” he said, as he shut up his note-book.
“You others may come in.”

I entered at once, followed by the landlady, and began to make observations for my own benefit, as I had not by then much respect for the penetration of the officer.

The landlady approached the windows, and was about to remove the heavy bars from one of the shutters, when the constable interfered.

“Stop—stop—stop,” he cried. “Touch nothing. Everything must be left as it is for the present. Fetch another candle.”

Then with still more deliberation he prepared to visit the bed room which lay beyond. His face wore the half-cheerful, half-nervous expression of a man who expects to come upon a sight professionally horrible. A look that said plainly—“We shall find him here, and a nice sight too.”

We pressed close behind him as he slowly opened the door, letting a flood of sunlight into the dimly lighted room in which we stood. As I was placed I could not see into the room, but watching his face, I saw it fall with a ludicrous expression of dismay. With a cry of surprise he darted into the room and I followed.

My eyes were dazzled for a moment by the glare of light, but, as soon as I could see, I looked quickly round. The room was very plainly, even scantily furnished, and there was no possible place of concealment. One glance showed me instantly that it was empty. The bed had obviously been untouched since it was last made.

John Stuart was gone.

CHAPTER II.

THE MISSING MAN.

A THOROUGH search of the cupboards and closets in the front room threw no further light on the mystery. One thing alone was ascertainable, John Stuart was gone.

“Well, this ’ere is a rum go!” was the only conclusion at which the policeman arrived.

He had so clearly made up his mind that it was merely a case of suicide, and the utter emptiness of the two rooms had so completely upset his calculations, that his disappointment, as is not uncommon with small minds, took the form of irritation.

“Why don’t you unbar one of them shutters?” he said roughly to the woman.

“You told her yourself to touch nothing,” I said, as she hastened to obey.

He glared at me for a moment in speechless indignation, and then turned away muttering under his breath something about “hinterferin’ with an orficer in the execution of ’is dooty.”

By this time one of the shutters was opened wide, the broad light of day poured into the room, and I continued, regardless of the officer, with whom I was thoroughly disgusted, to take notes on my own account. Once or twice, when I approached him, as he was clumsily muddling up the papers on the table,

he scowled fiercely at me under his brows, and growled, but he offered no further interruption.

At last, having set down all the circumstances I thought of value, I put on my hat, saying :—

“Well, the best thing I can do now, is to run up to the bank, and report to the manager.”

“No, you don’t,” he cried, leaping to his feet.

“What do you mean ?” I asked in surprise.

“Not without me,” he answered.

“Why not ?”

I was beginning to lose my temper, at the man’s incapacity and insolence.

“Well, you see, young man,” he said. “You were last seen in the company of this ’ere feller, and tho’ I don’t mean to say as I suspect—”

“You had better not,” I interrupted fiercely, my blood boiling with rage at the implication.

“Here, here, here,” he said, rapidly retreating behind the table, as I took a step forward. “Don’t let’s have any vi’lence. There ain’t no use in that.”

I looked at him, for a moment, with a contempt which ought to have withered him, and, turning on my heel, said :

“I am going to the bank. You can come too, if you like.”

“As I left the room I heard him hurriedly giving directions to the landlady about admitting no one, and, in another instant, he followed me out.

We walked up the hill in silence, but, as we passed the police station, he said, in a much humbler tone :

“Would you mind stepping in a minute, sir, while I speak to the superintendent?”

I nodded, and followed him in. The superintendent was writing at a high desk in a bare, plainly furnished office, when we entered. The man joined him, leaving me at the door, and began whispering to him in an eager, excited manner, occasionally glancing over his shoulder at me. His superior nodded once or twice during the earlier part of his narrative, but towards the end he seemed surprised. When the man finished, he laughed, saying:

“Pooh, man! Nonsense. Get along to the manager at once.”

Much crestfallen he followed me out, and, on our way to the bank, endeavored in a clumsy, awkward fashion to apologize for his suspicions. Mr. Barwell was expecting us, and listened to the policeman's story of the search with a troubled face.

“I'll come down myself at once,” he said, at the end, and, taking his hat, he led the way.

We found the landlady mounting guard before the broken door, and the rooms as we left them.

After his usual quick glance round, Mr. Barwell turned to the policeman and said:

“And what do you make of it?”

“Well, sir, my first opinion was that it was suicide, but now I think as how it's a case of absconscion.”

“Ah!” he replied, shortly. “Thank you. That'll do, my man. You can go.”

He thrust half a sovereign into his hand and dismissed him. He seemed at first puzzled at this ab-

rupt disposal of his authority, and inclined to resent it; but seeing that the awkward “hems” with which he tried to attract attention were completely ignored, he slunk sheepishly from the room, and we saw him no more.

“Now that that idiot is gone, let us see what we can find,” said Mr. Barwell, going to the table and proceeding to examine the papers. I followed his example, and for some time we remained silent, glancing hastily through various manuscripts which, as far as I was concerned, were of no importance whatever. Presently I came to an envelope, sealed and addressed.

“Here is an envelope, sir,” I said, “addressed to Mrs. Wilkins, who, I presume, is the landlady.”

“Call her in and inquire,” he said, without looking up. He had been engaged for some time in looking through a small book, which seemed to be a diary.

Mrs. Wilkins, as I expected, was the landlady; and as she declared herself unable to read anything but large print, I, at her request, opened and read the letter, Mr. Barwell suspending his investigation while I did so.

“Is it Stuart’s handwriting?” he asked.

“Yes, sir,” I answered. “Dated December 31st, 1852.”

“The night he disappeared. Go on.”

“Dear Mrs. Wilkins,” I read, “in case of my not returning within a week from the time you receive this, go to the cabinet between the windows and open the packet you will find in the top right-hand drawer.

John Stuart.”

"Is that all?" said Mr. Barwell.

"That's all, sir."

He silently reached across the table between us and silently I handed him the letter. An interval followed, during which he read and re-read the document several times. At last he rose and slowly went to the cabinet.

"He says after a week, sir," I ventured to remonstrate.

"I know, I know," he answered, sharply, as if he had doubts himself as to the propriety of his proceeding. "But in a case like this we can't afford to waste so much valuable time, when every minute may be important to his safety. I will take the responsibility." And he opened the drawer.

The package he took from it was small and apparently weighty, wrapped in white paper and carefully sealed. He paused a moment as if still uncertain and then hastily broke it open. It contained a small parcel and a document of some kind. Leaving the first on the table he proceeded to read the latter.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "this beats everything."

"Dear Mrs. Wilkins," he read aloud, "enclosed you will find a year's rent for my rooms. Keep them ready for me for that period. If by the end of that time I have not returned, you will probably never see me again. John Stuart."

For fully five minutes we gazed at one another in blank amazement, and then he turned to the woman, saying:

"That will do, thank you, Mrs. Wilkins. I will

keep this until the end of the week, and if Mr. Stuart has not returned by then you shall have it. See if you can find anything further," he added to me, as the landlady left the room, "while I finish reading this diary."

For ten minutes I turned over paper after paper without result, and I was beginning to think that further search was useless, when I was startled by a sudden exclamation from Mr. Barwell.

"Come here!" he cried, excitedly. "There, what do you make of that?"

The diary which he put before me was a small one, and contained for the most part items of no general interest; but every here and there was a strange entry in Stuart's neat handwriting. All were short and of the most mysterious import.

Sept. 26th. Have determined to make the attempt.

Oct. 5th. Failure, complete and utter.

Oct. 18th. Have, I believe, a glimmering of the light.

Nov. 1. Have heard the voice, indistinct, but unmistakable.

Nov. 17th. Have eaten nothing for four days.

Nov. 23d. Much nearer, I feel sure.

Dec. 14th. Nearer than ever.

Dec. 26th. Out of doors, a failure.

Dec. 31st. Determined to make the final attempt to-night.

And there an end.

"Now, what on earth is to be made of that?" said Mr. Barwell, when I had finished. Slowly we read them all through again, but at the end they remained

as incomprehensible as at first. Neither of us could make head or tail of the matter.

What was the attempt? What were the voice and light? What had eating nothing for four days to do with it? The meaning, if there was any, was beyond our comprehension.

"Would it not be as well, sir," I ventured to suggest, finally, "to examine his books at the bank."

"I have already done so roughly," he replied. "There is nothing wrong there, as far as I can see. No, that is not the reason why he has absconded."

"You think he has absconded?" I remarked.

"What else can I think? As far as I can make out he must be suffering from brain trouble of some kind, and has wandered away. He must be found."

"No, sir," I said firmly, "he has not absconded. What the solution of this mystery is I do not know, and almost fear to think. What the explanation may be, I know no more than you. But of one thing I am certain. John Stuart has neither absconded, nor wandered away."

Mr. Barwell stared at me for a moment, as well he might.

"No, no; of course not," he said. "I mean nothing criminal when I say, absconded."

"You misunderstand me, sir. John Stuart has neither absconded *nor* wandered away."

"What on earth do you mean?" he cried, completely puzzled. "One thing is certain. He is gone. Where?"

"That, sir, is and will, I fear, always remain a mystery."

“Pooh!” he said, brusquely. “How can you tell?”

“When I made my observations, I noticed several points which entirely escaped that brilliant policeman. Firstly, Stuart had taken off his boots. Therefore, if he went out afterwards he must have gone in his slippers.

Secondly: The shutters were barred on the inside. Thirdly: The lamp was half full of oil. Consequently it had been extinguished, and had not burned itself out.”

“Well!” interrupted Mr. Barwell. “I see nothing in all that to disprove my theory that he has wandered away in a fit of temporary aberration.”

“No, sir. But this room has only two doors. Both were locked and bolted, and in each, as you can still see for yourself, *the key is on the inside.*”

CHAPTER III.

INVESTIGATIONS.

THE week passed slowly away, but no news of John Stuart came to relieve our anxiety. A large reward was offered by the directors of the bank, who took the matter up warmly, when a searching examination of his books showed that they were perfectly correct and regular in the minutest particulars.

The police for miles around, stimulated by the

sum offered, were actively engaged in hunting for traces of the missing man, but as yet in vain. Not a soul could be found who had seen any one remotely resembling him. One man, indeed, a farmer, driving home about twelve o'clock on the night John Stuart disappeared, remembered to have passed a man a mile or so from the town on the Sellingham road, but when ferreted out he proved to be merely an ordinary tramp, utterly unlike Stuart, who seemed, doubtless for good reasons of his own, very much disturbed at the light thrown upon himself and his proceedings by the police. But whatever the cause of this distaste for notoriety may have been, it had manifestly no connection with John Stuart or his doings.

The ponds and rivers of the neighborhood were carefully dragged, but a plentiful supply of coarse fish and eels was the only reward of the investigators.

A description of Stuart's dress and personal appearance was advertised far and wide, but still with no result.

Mrs. Wilkins was examined and questioned again and again, but without eliciting anything further of importance. All she knew had been honestly told at first, and neither gained nor lost a tittle in the repetition.

There were fifty theories flying about—suicide, murder, abduction—all equally thrilling, and all equally supported by evidence. One thing only was known—John Stuart had disappeared. When he shut his door behind him at half-past ten on the night of December the thirty-first, he vanished utterly, and it would seem finally, from the eyes of men.

Mr. Barwell and I determined, after some deliberation, on keeping the facts of the diary and the locked doors to ourselves. Their publication could do no possible good, and might probably only act as a check on outside research.

The entries in the diary threw no light whatever on the matter, and their promulgation, and the comments they would receive, might, if Stuart ever reappeared, be prejudicial to him. As to the locked doors, Mr. Barwell observed that, as Stuart was gone, he must have got out somehow, and how he had managed to do it was of less present importance than where he had gone to when he had done it. That was not my view of the matter, but I did not choose to expose myself to the scornful incredulity which my opinion would have met with from his hard-headed common sense; so I held my tongue, and acquiesced in his conclusion, that silence was our wisest course.

At the end of the week Mr. Barwell called me into his private office, and, taking from his safe the packet he had found in Stuart's cabinet, handed it to me.

"The week is gone," he said, as he did so; "and, as Stuart has not come back, I suppose the only thing to be done is to fulfill the wish expressed here, as to his rooms. Take it down to Mrs. Wilkins yourself, and, while you are there, just take another look round that room and see whether you can make anything more of it."

Mrs. Wilkins, I observed, opened the door on the chain, but her face brightened when she saw me on the threshold, and she hastened to throw it wide.

“Oh, sir,” she said, as she stood aside to let me pass in. “I’m so glad it is only you. I’ve been so pestered and worried this whole blessed week that, if it lasts much longer, I shall only be fit for the ‘sylum.’”

“Well, Mrs. Wilkins, of course that is to be expected,” I answered. “But public curiosity will soon die out. And now I want to speak to you.”

“Will you please to step into my parlor ? she said, leading the way.

I noticed that she cast a half-frightened glance at Stuart’s door, and shrank to the other side of the passage as we passed it, but she made no allusion to the disappearance.

I took a seat in her cheerful little room, bright with afternoon sun, and producing the packet, said :

“Here, Mrs. Wilkins, is the rent to which Mr. Stuart referred. The week has passed, as you know, without any news of him so ; in accordance with his wishes, I have brought it to you.”

I laid it on the table before her, but she still stood wiping her hands nervously on her coarse check apron, and neither touched it nor looked at it. Her eyes were fixed on the floor, and her face wore an expression of doubt and distress.

“Must I take it, sir ?” she said at length.

“Take it !” I cried in surprise. “Why of course. Most women would be glad of such a chance. A year’s rent, and next to nothing to do for it.”

“I’d rather not have it, sir,” she answered. “I’d liefer let it bide with you.”

“That is out of the question,” I replied. “It was poor Stuart’s wish that you should keep the rooms for him, and I don’t see how you can refuse.”

“Oh, it isn’t that, sir,” she said hastily. “I’ll keep the rooms for him, and welcome, but I don’t like to touch the money, and he gone.”

This reluctance appeared to me so unusual and so strained, that, though I had, from the first, firmly believed in the woman, I could not help wondering whether she had not all along been keeping something back. With this idea in my mind, I leaned forward, and said solemnly :

“Mrs. Wilkins, are you quite sure that you have told us everything you know about this affair? Have you, out of a mistaken sense of duty to Mr. Stuart, concealed anything?”

“I, sir?” she cried, with a frightened look in her eyes. “Do you think I would do that, loving him like a mother as I did, if I may take the liberty of saying so of a young gentleman. I swear to God, sir,” she went on earnestly, “I know no more what has become of him than the babe unborn.”

“No, no; I didn’t mean that,” I interrupted. “But is there no little fact which might seem to you of no importance?”

“Well, sir,” she said, reluctantly, lowering her voice to a whisper, “there was one thing, but I didn’t like to mention it. I am certain Mr. Stuart never left the house that night. I barred and bolted all the doors and windows with my own hands, as my custom is, and in the morning they were barred and bolted still.”

I started at this confirmation of a belief which for a week past, had been lurking, half unacknowledged, in the darkest corners of my mind. I had hesitated to accept it; I had not been able to altogether reject it. Whatever had become of him, John Stuart had not left the house.

“Have you found nothing in his rooms to account for his absence?” I asked, after a period of deep consideration.

“Lor, sir,” she said, in a trembling voice, “I haven’t entered them since the door was mended; dursn’t do it. The mere thought of those empty rooms gives me the cold horrors. I hate even to pass the very door. Untold gold wouldn’t bribe me to go through it alone. At night I throws my apron over my head and just skurries by.”

“And you have heard no unusual sound?”

“Not a whisper, sir; the silence is that of the grave.”

“Mrs. Wilkins,” I said, rising, “would you mind going there now with me, or at all events letting me go alone?”

“I’ll come, sir, if so be you wish it,” she replied, with perceptible repugnance.

As I stood in the silent room I was filled with a vague feeling of fear. Here, if anywhere, was the key to the puzzle. These walls alone knew the secret of John Stuart’s disappearance. From this spot he had vanished; and to this spot, if to any, he would, I felt sure, return. But how he had left it, and where he had gone to, there was nothing to tell.

The house, as I have before remarked, was ancient.

Over the fireplace was carved a shield with a coat of arms, on either side of which were the initials R. T., doubtless those of the founder, and below the date 1534. The hearth was large and open, and on a sudden impulse I stepped onto it.

I did not for a moment imagine that Stuart had left the room by the chimney. Such a supposition was absurd; but no clue must be neglected, and I wished to ascertain if such a thing were possible.

I saw at a glance that it was not. The chimney, though so wide at starting, narrowed rapidly, and I noticed, against the pale light that glimmered from above, that even in its narrowest dimensions it was crossed and recrossed by stout iron bars. There was no escape that way from my dilemma.

Some of the furniture was very old, coeval, perhaps, with the house itself; the rest of various but more modern periods. The floor was stout oak, and the ceiling plaster, supported by heavy beams. I examined every square foot of the flooring with anxious care, but there was no sign of recent disturbance, and in despair I threw a final glance round the room, preparing to leave. A sudden flash of inspiration burst upon my mind.

Idiot that I must be not to have thought of it before. The walls were panelled. What more likely than that, in a spirit of inquiry, John Stuart had searched for and found a secret door? Having entered, it had closed behind him, doubtless with a spring, and he had found himself trapped. Perhaps he had perished already of suffocation; perhaps he

might still be lingering within a few feet of me, slowly dying of starvation.

The thought was horrible. Perhaps in the one fact that Mr. Barwell and I in our self-sufficiency, had thought fit to keep to ourselves lay John Stuart's only chance of escape. Possibly, while the whole country was being scoured, as I might have known, in vain, he had been hoping, day after day, that his involuntary hiding-place must be discovered. Day after day, hope had shone with a fainter light, till black despair had extinguished it utterly. As starvation slowly, but relentlessly, pursued its cruel course, he had, perchance, cried to heaven to put a period to his agony.

And all that time the one thing that might put the searchers on the right track had lain hidden up in the minds of Mr. Barwell and myself. In that case I felt, disguise it as I might, that his death would lie at our door.

In a fever of fear I scrutinized the walls, turning over in my mind as I did so the mysterious entries in the diary. There was nothing in them particularly favorable to the theory, but there was nothing absolutely against it. The reference to "a glimmering of the light" and "a voice indistinct but unmistakable" were inexplicable; but so they were in any case. The "failure out of doors" might apply to some external examination or measurement of the house. Could it be that he had discovered a hidden chamber occupied by some weird undying inhabitant? The whole affair was so incomprehensible that it was

out of the question to strain at any theory however wild and unreasonable.

Eagerly, almost fiercely, I searched the walls ; but I could find no trace of any opening. I hunted for a hidden spring, but found no sign of one. I pressed upon each panel in turn, but all were firm ; not a creak even gave evidence of looseness in any one. I beat upon them loudly with my clenched hands, but each sounded dull and solid. This last, it was true, was of no importance, for if the cries and blows of John Stuart, maddened by anguish, were inaudible from within, how much more so my less powerful efforts.

At last I desisted and sent for a carpenter. Together we went over the entire wall surface again, but he declared at the end that there was not a sign of a hidden opening, and I had to rest content with the assurance that if such an one did exist it was utterly undiscoverable from the outside.

On reflection, I concluded that there was no such thing ; for if a skilled carpenter could not find it, it was most unlikely that Stuart had, search as he might. It was an immense relief to me when I had satisfied myself of this.

With some difficulty I persuaded Mrs. Wilkins to accept the rent for the year, and having witnessed her mark to a receipt, for she was unable to write, I left the house.

As I returned slowly up the hill to the bank, in order to report to Mr. Barwell, I turned the matter over in my mind for the thousandth time. The little glimmering of light that I thought I had detected,

had been quickly extinguished. Under the circumstances I was glad that it was so. Any solution would be better than that one.

At present, however, there was none. The mystery of John Stuart's disappearance was as impenetrable as ever.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RETURN.

As week after week, and month after month rolled by, no news came from John Stuart. No hint as to his whereabouts, no shred of evidence as to his existence, no clue leading to an elucidation of the enigma of his sudden and complete disappearance was discovered.

One by one the searchers, amateur and professional, whom the promised reward had inspired with energy, relaxed their exertions, and finally gave up the case as hopeless, the prize as unattainable. Spring gave place to summer, summer to autumn, and when Christmas had passed once more, and the anniversary of the strange event approached, it had already become ancient history, and was well nigh forgotten by most.

In large cities sudden disappearances are unfortunately so common that the interest they excite is merely momentary. In a small country town like Wickworth the wonder is naturally more enduring;

but even there it does not survive the next murder or scandal. It is like a stone thrown into a pool—a great splash to begin with, ripple after ripple rolling to the banks, and when these pass away, all is calm again, and you can only gather from the whispering of the reeds in the more distant corners that anything has occurred to disturb the placid surface.

So it was with John Stuart. To the majority of people he was as if he had never been. Here and there in remoter ale houses, the matter still aroused occasionally a passing interest, in the absence of more exciting matter, but that was all. In Wickworth, to be sure, it was still the custom to relate the facts to any new-comer, and to take him down and show him the outside of the house where they occurred. But the eager crowds who had hastened to gape at the rooms themselves, had found some newer attraction and wandered elsewhere, leaving Mrs. Wilkins to possess her soul in peace.

But to myself, and to some extent also, I fancy, to Mr. Barwell, the affair was as fresh and as full of mystery as the first week after its occurrence. Day after day, as I sat at my desk, night after night, in the solitude of my rooms, I reviewed the circumstances again and again. I considered it from every point of view. No theory was too mad for me not to give it a hearing. But no arrangement of possibilities that I could invent would suit all the facts of the case. Over and over again I told myself that my attempts were hopeless, that the riddle was insoluble; over and over again I found myself returning unconsciously to its consideration, and every time my im-

imagination fell back beaten from every hold by those shuttered windows and locked doors.

It is needless to say that I missed John terribly at first. I had no notion, until he went, how important a part of my life he had become. When I turned and saw the stranger at his desk by my side, when I started for my now solitary evening walks into the country, I felt a sick longing to see his face, to hear his voice, and grasp his hand once more. If I had been sure that he was dead—if I could have had his grave to visit, and could have known that what had once been my friend John Stuart lay beneath, I think, I would have borne it better. But this vague uncertainty harassed me, and my mind flung itself once more against the impassable bars of the problem.

The day after Christmas-day, one week before John's ghostly tenancy of the rooms was to expire, I went down to interview Mrs. Wilkins. The worthy woman seemed to have taken a great liking to me, partly, I fancy, because of my friendship for John, partly because of the intense desire I had felt, and continued to feel, for some explanation of the matter. When I told her that I had made up my mind at the end of the year, to take and occupy the missing man's room myself, her face flushed, and her eyes positively sparkled with delight.

"And right glad I am to hear you say so, sir," she said joyfully. "I've been a wondering in my mind, for a long while, what to do about it. "I'm a poor woman, and I couldn't well afford to let 'em lie empty. And yet I couldn't bear to have Mr. Stuart a-coming back, and a-finding a stranger in his place."

“Do you still believe, then, that he will come back, Mrs. Wilkins?” I asked sadly.

“Come back?” she cried. “And of course he’ll come back. Why shouldn’t he? Where he’s gone, and what he’s doing no man can tell, but I feel sure, I feel sure, sir, he’ll come back. And when he comes in, and finds you a-setting in his old rooms, there’ll be a pleasant surprise for him, won’t there now?”

I could see that the good soul was not, in reality, half as hopeful as she tried to make out, and was speaking, more from a desire to relieve my despondency, than from inward conviction. But any expression of belief in John’s return was cheering, and having settled the terms, concluded the bargain, arranged to take possession that day week, I left her, and returned to the lodgings I was about to quit, with a lighter heart in my breast than I had worn for many a long month.

Was she right? I wondered; would the day ever come when I should see John Stuart again and hear his story?

On January the first, 1854, I moved my few possessions and formally entered into occupation of John Stuart’s rooms.

As I sat the first night in his old place, looking on the rooms he had known, I felt nearer to him than I had done for a long time. Here was the chair in which he had sat; there the table at which he had written; this the fireplace at which he had warmed himself; that the couch on which he had stretched himself to rest. It was hard to reject the belief that the door would presently open and his well-known

figure stand upon the threshold. There, surrounded by all the familiar details of his daily life, I could not convince myself that he had gone forever. The seed of hope that Mrs. Wilkins had revived in my breast seemed to bud and blossom in that congenial atmosphere. I felt a sure conviction that she was right in her intuitions, and that some day he would return. He was not, could not be dead. And here, somewhere under my very hand, if I could but find it, was the key of the mystery. Within sight of where I sat was the hidden door through which he had vanished. Though I could not discover it, it was there.

Inspired by the surroundings, I turned once more to the points of doubt, but my thoughts wandered involuntarily, more to the recollection of John Stuart himself, the man as I had known and loved him, than to his disappearance. Somehow I could not shake off the impression that he was there in the room with me. I seemed to feel his presence though our eyes might not meet, nor our hands touch, and I never after succeeded in ridding myself of this idea.

Undeterred by the failure of my first attempt, I diligently searched those rooms again and again for some sign of a secret opening. Not an inch of paneling or flooring escaped my prying eyes and probing fingers. Some months elapsed before I was finally satisfied that no spring existed which had been hidden from me, but discovered by him. At length, however, I gave up all investigations, and made up my mind to wait and hope. Always to hope, for by this time it had become an article of faith with me that Stuart would come back, and Mrs. Wilkins, I

soon found, really cherished the same conviction. Often, as time went on, we would talk of John and his return. We two, who almost alone remembered him, certainly alone thought ever to see him again.

To tell the truth, in the following weeks I began to weary rather of Mrs. Wilkins' confidences and opinions on the matter. She had a free and fluent tongue, and though I was unwilling to seem to put a slight upon a sympathy which took its rise from a mutual affection for the missing man, at the same time the unceasing flow of conversation which poured from her, when once the fountains of her silence were unsealed, became occasionally inexpressibly tedious. Anxious to avoid hurting her feelings in any way, I at last hit upon a delicate compromise. Whenever I wished to be alone and undisturbed with my thoughts, my books, or my writing, I used to lock the door and remain deaf to any summons.

To begin with, she objected strenuously. Indeed, on the first occasion on which she found it locked, she thundered on it so continuously and created such a turmoil, that I was finally compelled to abandon my fortress and open to her. When I had done so, I found her leaning against the door post, pale and haggard.

"Why, Mrs. Wilkins!" I cried. "What on earth is the matter? Are you ill?"

"Oh, don't 'ee do it, sir; don't 'ee do it," she replied, taking no notice of my questions.

"Do what?" I remarked, in some astonishment.

"Lock that door, sir," she answered. "I can't

a-bear to have it locked and you inside. Ever sence that night a locked door gives me the shivers."

I laughed at her fears, but I never succeeded in reconciling her to the use of the lock. At one time she hid the key, but I very quickly compelled her to restore it; and after a while, with a tact somewhat unusual in her class, she perceived the meaning of the locked door and never came in without previously asking if I was disengaged. Thenceforth it was only locked on rare occasions, when I was particularly anxious to be alone.

Such an occasion was the evening of June the thirtieth. It had been a sultry day, but had turned cooler towards the evening. After my tea I went for a stroll, and returning in the gloaming, sat down to enjoy a pipe and a quiet think. The windows were low, and in the recess of each was a broad oaken seat. Putting my feet on one of these, I settled myself so that I could see what passed in the road and prepared myself for an hour of peace.

The room behind me was dark, but the sky was still bright with the lingering twilight, a broad sea of brilliant green, in which swam a single clear star, like a pearl. Before me lay a stretch of lawn, and beyond the open iron railing which bounded it, ran the road, looking hot and white in the dusk. From somewhere among the trees, which rose against the sky on the other side, the clear, sweet notes of a belated thrush thrilled up into the silence. Otherwise it was wonderfully, almost oppressively still. Not a breath of wind came to rustle the foliage. The tread of the occasional passer-by was deadened by the soft

white dust that lay thick upon the road, and remained floating in little clouds long after the foot that had disturbed it had passed out of hearing. The bats chattered as they wheeled in mazy circles through the heavy air. Far away in the distance a single grasshopper shrilled its even song, emphasizing rather than disturbing the great hush of dying day. The small bustlings and clatterings that Mrs. Wilkins gave rise to in her household work, and which were generally so obtrusive in the evening quiet, were stilled. Silence reigned supreme.

So sitting, the smoke of my pipe illuminated by a faint glow, as that of a volcano by its subterranean fires, my thoughts wandered away to John Stuart

Where was he? What was he doing? When, when would he come back?

I tried to imagine him at the moment advancing slowly along the road to Wickworth. Nearer and nearer, step after step he came, passing, one after the other, old familiar landmarks; the bridge on which we had lounged, the stile at which we had lingered; now he is under the old oak, he has left the milestone behind him, he is in the road—at the gate—on the threshold—here, in the very room!

What was that?

From far, very far away, ringing through the still air, came a voice calling on me for help, again and again. It was his—John Stuart's!

So vivid was the impression that I started to my feet, and was about to rush from the room, shouting in reply. But the sudden movement broke the spell

of my imaginings, and I sank back into my chair again, half laughing at my folly.

And yet—and yet. Was it fancy, or had I really heard it? The more I thought, the more doubtful I became, the less able was I to decide the question. Reason told me clearly it could not be, but Recollection said it had been. Beyond all doubt it was John Stuart's voice, but so altered, and shaken by distress, by hopeless despair, that I could never have imagined it. Still it rang in my ears, "Come to me! Come to me! Come to me!"

Mentally, I determined that I would. Closing my eyes, and withdrawing my thoughts as far as possible from the outer world, I let my spirit loose to wander whither it would, with but one goal to reach, one object to attain—John Stuart.

At first it roamed vaguely and aimlessly through space; the mystery of his disappearance, the uncertainty of his whereabouts, hampered and restrained it. But, by degrees, it took a more definite direction, as a pigeon released circles twice or thrice before starting on its undeviating course. Concentrating all my thoughts, all my will power upon John Stuart, I endeavored to draw his mind to mine. Gradually I seemed to get a grip on something. I seemed to be conscious of his presence, to feel his spiritual hand straining indefinitely through the darkness to grasp mine. All sights and sounds of earth were forgotten. Through the dark vaults of space my spirit soared seeking for his. My whole body became rigid with the mental exertion, as I poured more and more will power into the vast unknown. I felt sure that

mine was stronger than his, and I knew—I knew that I should find him. So sitting, I either slept, or fell into a trance.*

Suddenly with a start and a shiver I came to myself. It was quite dark around me, though the heavens were still light with the semi-darkness that reigns throughout a summer night, paling the stars. I felt weak and enfeebled, and was conscious of a curious sensation: a feeling that I was not alone, that some one else was in the room. But my mind was so relaxed after its late efforts that I felt no curiosity to rise and see, no inclination to inquire. All I wanted was rest. I could have sat as I was, gazing vacantly into space, without stirring hand or foot, through the long night, until dawn crept slowly up the eastern skies. Probably, so enervated was I, I should so have sat had I been undisturbed. I was filled with perfect peace.

Suddenly the silence of the room was shivered by a sort of gasping sigh from the darkness behind me.

Flinging all my languor to the winds, I leaped to my feet, and turned.

There in a chair by the empty hearth, half sat, half lay, the figure of a man. The room was so dark that I could make out neither form nor feature, only a dim mass, which I knew to be a man.

My hair crisped on my head, and my blood chilled in my veins, as I clutched the window curtain to prevent my knees giving way beneath me. What was it? Who was it? My fear was wild, unreasoning. I could not move, I scarcely dared to breathe. As I stood, gazing at that doubtful shape, I heard a

foot approaching along the road outside. Nearer and nearer it drew, and as it came my fears retreated before it. My breath came freely once more, my heart beat at its accustomed pace, and, as it paused at the gate, with a long sigh of relief I again stood erect.

A bright ray of light shone into the room as the man lighted the lamp outside, and passed on. Full upon that dark form it fell, illuminating every feature, and revealing, as I expected, the face of the long lost man, John Stuart!

But, oh, how altered! How different from the handsome, healthy face, radiant with life and spirit, that I had known! What sufferings had he gone through to be so changed in a short eighteen months? His cheeks, that had been so full and ruddy, were hollow and deathly pale; his lips, which had ever a responsive smile lingering on them, were drawn and colorless; his eyes were deep sunken in their sockets, his hands white and thin. Had eighteen years passed, instead of eighteen months, he could not have changed more. So frail, so unsubstantial did he appear, that I was still uncertain whether it were he or his ghost, and I lighted the lamp, which stood on the table, before I ventured to move nearer to him.

His eyes were closed, and his breath seemed to struggle with difficulty through his parted lips.

When the light fell upon him, he half turned, and moaned uneasily, his lips trembled, and his face twitched. All at once his eyes opened, looking large, and black, and unearthly, above his shrunken cheeks. He glanced round the room, but, instead of the flash of joyful recognition which I anticipated, a ghastly

look of horror crossed his face. Slowly his eyes travelled on, and I saw an expression of puzzled surprise slowly growing upon him. At length they fell upon me as I stood in the half shadow beside him. He shuddered, and then with a little cry leaned forward. But the next moment he fell back again in the chair, and passed his hand twice or thrice across his eyes. Presently, he glanced downwards at his clothes, gazed at them, felt them, and once more turned to me, with a revived hope in his eyes.

“What is it?” he murmured. “Where am I?”

“Why, here,” I said cheerily. “In the old house at Wickworth.”

He staggered to his feet with a smothered cry.

“Is it you? Is it you, indeed, old fellow?” he asked.

“It is I, past doubt,” I answered.

“Let me touch, let me feel you,” he cried, and fell forward into my arms.

“Oh, it is, it is, it is!” he murmured again and again, half laughing and half crying. After a time, when he was somewhat calmer, I put him back into the chair, for he was pitifully weak. He sat there for some time, holding my hand tightly.

“It is you,” he said more than once; “not a dream? Really, and solidly you?”

And he felt my face and clothes again and again, to assure himself.

Suddenly he buried his face in his hands, and burst into tears.

“Oh! what an escape,” he sobbed. “Thank God! What an escape!”

I was anxious to go for Mrs. Wilkins, partly to tell her the joyful news, partly to get her assistance in calming and restoring him. But he would not let me go. When I attempted to do so, he clung to me in a frenzy of terror, like a frightened child to its mother.

"No, no! Hold me close," he cried. "For God's sake, don't leave me! Keep me here with you."

For a long time I sat by him, consoling and soothing him. I asked him once where he had been in his absence, but his only answer was a fresh burst of tears and a repetition of his former cry: "Oh, what an escape!"

If I attempted to leave him, he trembled fearfully and begged me again to hold him close. At last I persuaded him, with difficulty, to let me cross the room, provided I did not go out of his sight, and I took the opportunity of pouring out a glass of brandy, which I made him swallow.

Gradually he came to himself. He ceased to tremble, and seemed to have mastered his fear that I should vanish like a dream if he let go of me.

When he seemed quite calm and thoroughly satisfied of my reality, I asked him once more where he had been. He groaned and shook his head.

"To-morrow," he said. "Don't ask me now. I'll tell you all about it to-morrow. To-night I want to just sit here and talk to you. I shall be strong and well to-morrow, and then I will tell you all." And as he spoke he shuddered.

For upwards of an hour we sat, hand clasped in hand, chatting of past times. He asked me several very curious questions. Among others, what day of

the month and what year it was. He was evidently completely ignorant of even the most important events which had occurred in his absence. He had not heard of the Crimean War. Where had he been the while?

At length I observed in him a growing drowsiness, and after one or two dozings and sudden startled re-awakenings, he fell into a peaceful slumber, still holding my hand. By degrees his grasp relaxed, until he released me.

Then, as I rose softly, with the intention of warning Mrs. Wilkins of his re-appearance, I remembered that I had locked myself in that evening.

John Stuart had returned as mysteriously as he had disappeared.

CHAPTER V.

A LAST WORD.

MY task is nearly finished. With what difficulty and trouble is known only, and of interest only, to myself. I am no hand at writing, save banking accounts, business letters, and such like, and I should have preferred to abstain altogether from intruding my own uninteresting personality between the reader and the following extraordinary story of my late friend, John Stuart. It was, however, his particular wish, expressed to me on his death-bed, that if ever I thought fit to publish his narrative to the world I should prelude it with a clear and circumstantial ac-

count of his disappearance, as known to me. He himself, for reasons which will sufficiently appear in due time, was unable to observe what effect it had on the public; and he could not, I am bound to confess, have chosen any one so well suited to do it in his place as myself.

I was his best friend, his fellow-clerk in the Wickworth bank, and I conducted the investigations which were set on foot at the time by the directors of that bank. I, moreover, took the apartments from which he had vanished, and it was to me that he had first appeared on his return.

I am unacquainted, as I have said, with the art of narrative, and have endeavored merely, to the best of my ability, to state the exact facts of the case clearly and straightforwardly.

Doubtless there are many little details which a skilled writer would have worked up and made of thrilling interest; many things which I have thought important, which he would have passed over lightly or omitted. Of one thing only I am certain. No one, whatever his skill, could have told the story more truthfully. I have neither exaggerated nor suppressed anything. As each event transpired, so it is set down. If I have wandered unnecessarily it must be attributed to my inexperience, and will, I hope, be excused.

If, now that it is finished, the reader should find it wearisome or uninteresting I shall not be surprised. I knew John Stuart and he did not. The fault, at all events, must be laid on his shoulders, who will never feel it now, not on mine.

I have already said that I had no desire to have any hand in this matter, and that it was only at his urgent request that I reconciled myself, unwillingly to undertaking the job.

That is my final word of defence.

The adventure which follows was first told to me by Stuart on the morrow of his return. He repeated it afterwards to Mr. Barwell and many others, who had sorrowed at his loss and rejoiced at his return.

It was only after constant pressing on their part, as well as mine, that he consented finally to write it down at length, or rather to dictate, while I wrote it, for he, poor fellow, was in far too weak a state of health to undergo the actual manual exertion.

When it was finished I read it over to him, and he gave it to me to make what use of it I pleased, asserting at the same time that it was correct in every particular. He drew for me with his own hand a map of the island, with the position of the treasure roughly marked; but since, as will be seen, he was ignorant of its latitude or longitude, it could only be discovered by a chance recognition of it from the description. I have neither time, means, nor indeed, inclination to seek it. It seems to have been one of the Carribees, but even this is doubtful. The rebellion in which he so unconsciously took a part, appears, from internal evidence, to have been Wyatt's disastrous attempt, or in some way connected with it.

He stipulated that, if I finally saw reason to publish it, I should not alter any single fact. He gave me permission, otherwise, to make any alteration in style that I chose. I have consequently changed the whole

story into the third person, because, though I am compelled to write this prologue in the first, I think nothing is so irritating as a book in which "I's" are perpetually popping out all over the place. I may be peculiar in that opinion, but I rather think not. I have, moreover, left out several eulogistic references to myself, which my modesty would not permit me to print, confining all such mention to the words "my best friend," a title which I can honestly claim.

With these exceptions, as he dictated it to me, so I give it to the world at large.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE SEED IS SOWN.

JOHN STUART, the hero—or, perhaps it would be more appropriate to say, the victim—of the following strange adventure, was born, and passed the early years of his life in Scotland. The incidents of his childhood, and the character of his education, are of no general interest, excepting in so far as they throw light upon the influences which led him into a course of speculations of which the final, practical outcome proved so disastrous.

His father was a fairly well-to-do farmer in Skye, who was, or considered himself, on somewhat indefinite grounds, a disappointed man, and the naturally gloomy views which he imbibed from the harsh Calvinistic doctrines he professed, were heightened and increased by the discontent that grew upon him with advancing years.

He entertained a great opinion of his abilities as a preacher, or expounder, and the blood-curdling pictures of future punishment which he painted for the edification of his son, when he in anywise offended against the rigid and impossible code of morality to which he was expected to conform, cost that unfortu-

nate infant, for he was little more, many a night of sleepless horror.

Doubtless, could he have flown to the tender care and sympathy of a mother, he might have been less affected by these dismal foreshadowings of his inevitable fate, but she had unfortunately died in bringing him into the world, and his father's frequent references to that fact when he was thundering comminations at the trembling child, had produced at last upon his confused comprehension, the impression that he was personally responsible, and that her blood was upon his head.

There can be no doubt that such an idea never entered his father's mind, but John was so accustomed to regard everything he did or said as sinful, to be reminded, every hour of the day, that he was a wilful, erring creature about whose ultimate destination there could be little difference of opinion, and his father, when once started upon one of his healing discourses, was so led away by his own eloquence, and the glamour of his own ghastly imaginings, that the origin of the misapprehension is easy to realize.

It is impossible to believe that the old man in the least understood the effect that his continual threats and warnings would have upon the sensitive imagination of the boy. His desire was indubitably to be eminently just above all things. It was, he conceived, entirely for the boy's good; and when he had sent him, shivering in an agony of trepidation, up the dark staircase to creep to bed in the dark room, he comforted himself with the reflection that he was helping

the good work, and was in a fair way to snatch this brand, at least, from the burning.

John's only relief from the cheerful admonitions of his father, of whom he stood, not unnaturally in constant and scarce-concealed dread, lay in the company of old Maisie the housekeeper.

Whether he was much the gainer is perhaps open to doubt.

Her mind, like that of most old Scotch housewives, was stored to the brim with ghost lore of the most grim and direful character. Story after story, all of the most appalling description, would she pour into his reluctant ear, until he was almost mad with fright.

He would cower for hours by the kitchen fire, torn between his longing to escape from Maisie's flow of gruesome legends, and his growing terror of the darkness waiting for him overhead.

When at last she dismissed him, the interval between his forsaking the cheerful glow of the fire, and his finding himself safely ensconced between the blankets, was a period of intense insensate fear.

Every light or shadow in the hallway, every creak or rustle on the stairs was fraught with fearful meaning. If he crawled slowly there was always some unimaginable horror just ahead, if, in sheer desperation, he ran, he was pursued in his headlong flight by shapeless rushing phantoms. When he reached his room, happy was he if a faint glimmering of moonlight came to relieve the gloom, though even then there were invariably awful shadow-haunted corners wherein lurked nameless threatening dangers. Oftener

however, standing in the centre of the peopled darkness, he would hastily fling his garments from him, and leap from afar into the sheltering bed to elude the clutch of the demon couched beneath.

In short, owing to his father's want of consideration, and old Maisie's indiscretion, the boy's mind was reduced to a most unhealthy state of depression. The air around him was thronged with malevolent though invisible beings, and the only future he was permitted to contemplate was one of unending torment. It is small wonder that he became a timid, morbidly nervous child.

As he grew older he, of course, shook off some of his fears. His father's menaces had less influence upon him, and Maisie's stories lost much of their terror from repetition, and from the increasing power he attained of regarding them from a sounder point of view. Not that he ever escaped entirely from his belief in his supernatural surroundings; the impression made upon his youthful mind was too lasting for that.

When he was twelve years old an event occurred which would have confirmed, had that been necessary, his convictions on the subject.

He had, for some time, been in almost daily companionship with a strange gaunt old shepherd, whom he had encountered in his solitary rambles, and who, Maisie assured him, had the reputation of being a seer. John often plied him with questions on the subject, but the old man was very shy of referring to it at all.

He seemed, however, for some reason, drawn to

the lonely boy, and one evening John found him in an unusually communicative frame of mind.

He was seated on a rock at the head of a narrow cleft which, bent through the lofty cliffs by some old world convulsion, led down to the sea. The sun had already set, and it was getting dark when John took a seat beside him.

In answer to John's persistent requests, he related one or two personal experiences of wraiths, and warning spirits, and then, fixing his deep-sunken eyes on him, said in his broad Scotch accent:

“Ye'll be a bit of a seer yerself, 'am thinking.”

John assured him that he had never seen anything that was not directly attributable to natural causes.

“Nae, nae,” he said, “ye're ower young the noo. —Bide a wee,” he continued, rising. He took his stand behind him, and placing both hands on his shoulders, stood for some minutes in silence.

A peculiar tingling sensation seemed to flow over John from the hands firmly gripping him. His spirit seemed to be lifted from within him, and to float abroad upon the evening air. A strange feeling of lightness, like that breathed in on lofty mountain heights, possessed him, a sort of spiritual intoxication.

“Look, look, mon!” cried the shepherd suddenly. “D'ye see naething?”

John looked down the ravine which sloped away rapidly from their feet, and saw climbing towards them, among the boulders that littered the glen from side to side, a figure he had not observed before. It appeared to advance slowly and with difficulty. It

was still too far away to be recognizable, but there seemed to John to be something familiar about it, though it was curiously wrapped in an indefinite long white garment reaching from the chin to the feet. When it was near enough to be easily distinguished the head, that had been bowed as the man clambered over the rocks, was lifted, and John looking on the face knew it for that of his father.

With a cry of consternation, the shepherd snatched his hands from John's shoulders, and on the instant the figure was no longer there. The ground on which it had been standing was more open than the rest of the glen, and there was apparently no hiding-place at hand, yet it had gone.

The shepherd, without another word, hurried John away from the spot. His wondering conjectures as to what his father was doing there so strangely dressed, and where he had gone to, met with no response. His companion proceeded rapidly in silence, muttering to himself, and shaking his head.

When they parted, where the path led down to the Manse, he enjoined John strictly to say nothing to any one of what he had seen, and his surprise at the old man's urgency was increased by overhearing him murmur to himself :

“Puir bairn ! Puir, fatherless, orphan bairn !”

As John turned at the door of the house, he saw him still standing clear cut against the evening sky, as if watching him, but his parting wave of the hand called forth no salutation in reply.

He had pledged his word not to mention the matter, and manfully held his tongue, though he was

burning to ask Maisie's explanation of the affair. He was in far too great awe of his father to venture to question him as to his presence in the glen.

His curiosity was soon enough dispelled.

Three days afterwards his father was found dead at the foot of the headland which bordered the glen on the south, and was carried painfully and with difficulty up it, and across the intervening ridge to the Manse.

Whether he had slipped and fallen, or whether in a frenzy of the religious insanity, which had been rapidly growing on him of late, he had flung himself over, was never known. He was dead, and John needed no one to tell him that the figure he had seen had been his father's wraith.

Never again in the whole course of his life was he to forget that evening. If at any time the sceptical arguments of his companions shook for a moment his confidence in the reality of supernatural appearances, that scene rose clearly before him, and swept away his doubts.

Once more he sat, the strange old man gripping his shoulders from behind, gazing out between the frowning headlands at the twilight sky and sea. Once more he saw, painfully crawling in the grim shadowed abyss at his feet, that shroud-clad figure, and as his father's pale stern face was turned to meet his, a voice arose in his soul crying:

"How can I choose but believe?"

The seed that had been sown by that event in his mind, already ploughed and harrowed by Maisie's traditions and his father's burning words, quickened

and lived. With a reserve that was characteristic of him he never told the story to any one, not even to his best friend, and in spite of the strong belief that was in him, he was always unwilling to discuss the subject of a spiritual world. He shrank from the contemptuous sneers that would have greeted the relation of his own experience, and, as he was consequently unable to give any explanation of his firm faith, he carefully avoided the matter, in conversation. He was, however, given to reading and thinking deeply about anything that interested him, and as he grew older, and his mind developed under education, he gave more and more of his thoughts to the consideration of the subject.

In spite of the prophecy of the old shepherd, he had never since that evening seen any vision, or obtained even the most fleeting glimpse of the unseen world. Although he had taken considerable trouble to put himself in the way of such a revelation his efforts had never been rewarded. But continual failures did not daunt him.

He still believed that he was *fey*, or as the shepherd had expressed it, 'a bit of a seer,' and he never doubted that the day would come when he would find himself able to communicate freely and without hindrance, with the inhabitants of the unseen.

Had he but known what was in store for him, could he have foreseen to what a dreadful goal his searchings after the unknown would lead him, had he conceived the faintest notion of what terrible misery the satisfaction of his longings would bring him, he would have flung the whole subject from him with

loathing, and fled the merest thought of it with dread.

If any one contemplates undertaking the task John Stuart accomplished, let him pause ere it is too late, lest he meet with even a worse fate. It is not every one who can hope to be rescued by a friendly spirit, as he was rescued.

If this narrative should act as a timely warning to one single soul, should turn one mind from that too fascinating line of speculation, should stay one rash hand from experimenting with such dangerous matters, it will not have been written in vain.

CHAPTER II.

THE BUD BLOSSOMS.

THE interval between Stuart's childhood and manhood may be passed over briefly. There was nothing in it to distinguish it from the usual run of school and college life. He was, to all outward appearance, the ordinary schoolboy, and developed in time into the ordinary collegian. The income derived from the farm that he had inherited from his father was sufficient to support the expenses of his education, though not large enough to enable him to lead a life of idleness as a man.

Consequently, at the age of five-and-twenty, he applied for, and obtained the position of junior clerk

in the Wickworth and County Bank, and took up his residence in that town.

Of his works and amusements there it is unnecessary to speak; they were those of an ordinary young man in a small country town. It is his inner life, his mental development that calls for notice.

In his search for lodgings on his first arrival he was fortunate enough to secure surroundings singularly in sympathy with his spiritual aspirations. In an old house, dating from the fifteenth century, on the outskirts of the town, just at the foot of the hill on which it was built, he obtained two rooms exactly suited to his requirements. The house had seemingly remained unaltered since the day it was finished, and some of the furniture in his apartments looked as if it had never been moved, since the original proprietor had installed it where it harmonized so admirably with the panelled walls, and oak beams of the ceiling.

Here, if anywhere, Stuart thought, he would find an atmosphere favorable to the cultivation of that power of communication with the ghost world, which he believed himself to possess, and ardently desired to mature. It was, to use a common phrase, the very place for a ghost.

For a long time his hopes in this direction were doomed to disappointment. All through the spring and summer he watched and waited in vain. Not a sign or sound of anything supernatural gratified his anticipations. He first occupied the rooms in March, but it was not until the warm twilight of the August evenings that he seemed to be nearing the object of his ambitions. Even then the indications were so

faint, so entirely vague and uncertain, that he was doubtful whether his fancy were not playing tricks upon him. So indefinite was the first intimation he received that it is almost impossible to put it into words.

It appeared to him, as he sat in the silent room, that there was, from time to time, a kind of tremor in the air around him; it was too slight to be called an agitation; it resembled, rather, the quivering of the atmosphere on a hot day, made sensible to the soul instead of visible to the eyes.

The first time that he was aware of it, he attributed it to the jar of a very distant explosion, or the vibration caused by a heavily laden wagon far away. It chanced that on his table stood a vase full of plumey grass so delicate that the lightest breath of air stirred its silvery tassels. Fixing his eyes on these he waited for a recurrence of the sensation. He remained for some time in silence, scarcely drawing breath, his whole soul watching, until his eyes grew dim. Suddenly it came again a faint—faint shiver, but not a plume of the bunch before him trembled.

After a time, when the feeling had occurred frequently, always at shorter intervals and with increasing force, he began to realize that it was internal not external, spiritual not physical, within himself not in the surrounding air. It was something, as yet he knew not what, that appealed to him alone. It acted, he told himself, in his own mental atmosphere, not in the actual one in which he lived and breathed. Then for the first time flashed upon him the light which was destined to lead him to his doom.

It came, as the first intimations of events fated to be the turning point of destiny frequently do, by chance.

He was a musician by nature, and, possessing a moderate income in addition to his salary, he was able to gratify and cultivate his tastes in that direction. He played well on the piano, and passably on the violin.

One evening, early in September, when the peculiar trembling sensation had lost its novelty but not its interest, he was seated at his piano playing softly to himself. His violin lay on the instrument close at hand, and he noticed that when he struck the notes to which it was tuned, its strings palpably quivered. If he played loudly they throbbed and murmured like living things, but when his hands strayed lightly and listlessly over the keys, the vibration was so slight as to be perceptible rather than visible. Unconsciously it suggested to him the feeling he had so frequently experienced of late. The resemblance struck him like a blow.

He rose, and taking up the violin, he stood with his back to the empty fire place, turning it over and over in his hands, as he turned the thoughts it had suggested over and over in his mind.

With a sudden and reasonless impulse he raised it to his shoulder, and drew the bow smartly across it, calling forth from it a long clear note, and sharply, from a glass that stood on the shelf behind him, sprang an answering note in unison.

He laid the instrument aside, and as the ringing of the glass died away, he sat down to arrange his ideas.

He had at last, he believed, found the path he sought.

“Everything in nature,” he reasoned, “is tuned to some accord. When that note is struck, by an inexorable law, it vibrates in unison. When it is sounded loudly, or near at hand, it responds with no uncertain voice; if it is soft or very far away, the answering throb is so slight as to be inaudible and even invisible. That, I feel sure, is the reason of the sensation I have had so often lately. If the law is so invariable in the physical world, why should it not apply also to the spiritual?”

“It must,” he cried, rising and rapidly pacing the room in the excitement of his inspiration. “It does—I feel sure that it does.”

The more he reflected upon the matter, the more certain he became that he had discovered the true solution of the problem. Somewhere, in that mysterious world he wished to enter, a spirit wandered in unison with his own. Either its atmosphere was very far removed from his, or the affinity between them was at present of the slightest. In any case, he was convinced, from the increasing power and frequency of the sensation, that the obstacle, whatever it might be, was to be overcome.

It may not be impertinent to state here, as concisely as possible, the metaphysics of existence which John had evolved from reading and observation.

Every human being, he maintained, existed in, and because of a mental atmosphere entirely his own. His physical environment was part, though by no means an essential part, of that atmosphere, for it

was possible for any one to partially detach himself from it. Thus a man's body may be seated in London, while he himself is, to all intents and purposes, in Edinburgh, and he can pass instantaneously, annihilating time and space, from one spot to the other. This faculty is conventionally known as memory, or imagination; but John was convinced that the full importance of its meaning was far from being recognized.

If there be company in the room in which he is seated he is unconscious of their presence, and neither hears nor sees them. He is in what is known, more truthfully than many realize, as a state of absence of mind.

The mental atmospheres of no two beings correspond exactly, but when they are thrown very much together, when the two are in close affinity, their atmospheres may assimilate so thoroughly as to be nearly, though never quite, the same. Have not cases been known in which the mental atmospheres of two individuals have been in such intimate harmony that each was conscious of the actions and thoughts of the other when thousands of miles of mere terrestrial space have separated them?

It was his conviction that by a sufficiently powerful exercise of will, a man could draw the mental atmosphere of another into such harmony with his own, and so compel him, for a time at least, to see with his eyes and hear with his ears. Thus, when the old shepherd placed his hands on John's shoulders, he removed him, by an effort of will, into his atmosphere, and enabled him to distinguish a figure which was in-

visible to him when in his own. If this could be done partially, why not altogether? If it could be brought about by the exercise of another's will, why not by his own? These were the problems he devoted himself to investigating.

It is impossible to deny that there are numerous well-authenticated instances of apparitions which have been visible and sometimes audible, though in few and doubtful cases tangible, to the spectator. Is it not natural to conclude that in numerous cases these visitants are present, though, owing to the lack of the necessary sympathy, they remain invisible and inaudible? Since, then, it is possible for a man to be in the presence of others who are unconscious of his presence, it is more than probable that others might be in his presence without any knowledge of the fact on his part.

As a general rule, the spiritual visitor has been one whose previous intimacy with the person visited has been so close as to materially assist the harmonizing of the different mental atmospheres; but there are important exceptions. In such cases, John argued, the apparition, or ghost, as it is commonly called, can only have entered the other's mental atmosphere of its own volition, aided, doubtless, by an innate affinity in the other.

"If, in short," he argued, "it is practicable for another, who has never been part of my surroundings, to introduce himself into my mental atmosphere, what is there to prevent my conveying myself into the atmosphere of another, for whom I was previously non-existent?"

“Somewhere in space,” he concluded, “there is evidently a spirit whose mental atmosphere is, as yet very imperfectly, in accord with mine. My object must be to increase and strengthen that harmony.”

When, after some weeks of cogitation, he had reasoned himself into the conviction that his theory was, in the main, correct, he determined to beat down, if possible, the barriers that opposed him.

On the twenty-sixth of September he noted in his diary :

“Have determined to make the attempt.”

His first efforts were devoted merely to augmenting the intensity of the sensation, and in this he succeeded with very little difficulty. By fixing his mind firmly on the subject and banishing all wandering thoughts, by courting and inviting the feeling, he so far increased his powers of appreciating it that when it came his spirit shook within him like a reed in the wind, and even his body shivered in sympathy, as it does when, according to the old saying, “a goose is walking over one’s grave.”

Having advanced so far, he next set himself to compel the emotion, to force it to come to him, instead of simply waiting to receive it. His only success at first lay in the greater frequency of the visits, but in time he managed to produce them, now and then, by the exercise of his will ; gradually he obtained such complete mastery over his mind that he could, whenever he wished, bring on the mental tremor, and he became certain that somewhere in space another spirit was shaken in response.

The evening was the only time when he had suffi-

cient leisure and solitude for these mental exercises, and he spent nine of them before he arrived at the desired perfection. But on October the fifth he was so satisfied with his progress, that he resolved to try at once to bring the mental atmosphere of the other so far into harmony with his as to render it visible to his eyes. Seated in silence in the dim twilight of his room, he gave his whole soul to the effort. Detaching, as far as in him lay, his thoughts from all sublunary affairs he strove to draw the spirit to him. But he found himself unable to attain to the desirable height of spiritual exaltation. He could not sufficiently dismiss the actual. All sorts of petty sounds disturbed him. The distant barking of a dog, a footstep on the road, or the cry of a boy from the town distracted his attention, and brought his mind fluttering to earth like a tethered bird. Finally, the entrance of his landlady with the lamp shattered the spell, and he gave up the attempt in disgust. He felt weak and unstrung, and despairingly entered in his diary, before retiring to rest, the curt, but disheartening sentence :

“Failure, complete and utter.”

Undeterred, however, by this reverse, he began once more the following evening to train his mind in the right direction, with ever-growing success. The sensation, as long as he remained in the room in which he had first experienced it, became at length continuous, and merged at last by imperceptible degrees into the settled assurance of some other presence in the room. After a time, this was so marked that he could tell with precision in what part

of the room it was, and follow, mentally, all its movements. He now became certain that his final success was merely a matter of time. Constantly bestowing his attention on the one object of forcing himself into harmony with the other, was slowly, but surely advancing him to the fulfillment of his desires.

At times he would speak aloud to the mysterious presence, but he obtained no response, and he knew that his voice was at present inaudible in the other's atmosphere. But he continued to hope, and on November the first, in reply to his usual question:—

“Who are you?” After a long pause, there came back a faint, incomprehensible rejoinder. It was like a voice coming from very far away—a mere inarticulate murmur, as of one imperfectly heard through a telephone. But though the sense was undistinguishable, the sound was unmistakable.

He had studied with care all the books he could procure which bore on the subject of his experiments, and he observed that the adepts who were the most expert in the art of withdrawing from the outer life into a trance, laid great stress on the necessity of abstinence, and the mortification of the fleshly envelope. Perhaps his too robust physical constitution was the cause of his continued failure. He proceeded at once to put this expedient into practice, and little by little, reduced his daily allowance of provision.

The effect was shortly appreciable from the greater power of self-absorption and the higher mental sublimation he was able to attain.

On November the seventeenth, when he had by various stratagems, avoided taking any nourishment,

save water, for four days, the answer when he spoke came back so clearly and quickly that, though he was still unable to distinguish the actual words, he knew that he was much nearer his aim.

For a whole month he continued this self-denial, taking no more food than was absolutely essential to support existence. He had been of a strong, sturdy temperament, and it took him some time to reduce himself to a sufficiently ethereal condition, but he succeeded at length, to the grief and amazement of his landlady and his best friends, who were beginning to express serious alarm at his pining away so rapidly. It was with the greatest difficulty that he prevented them from calling in medical advice.

On December the 26th, about ten at night, he started for a solitary walk, and after an hour's brisk exercise, he found himself in an open space, known generally as Cricnell Common, which lay rather less than four miles to the south of Wickworth. He was warm with walking and somewhat exhausted, as his late system of abstention had considerably diminished his endurance, so he sat himself down for a short time to rest.

The intense silence affected him powerfully. Above him the stars rolled silently on their appointed paths around the Pole star, while from the valley which stretched away at his feet, not a sound rose to disturb the stillness. In the distance the lights of Wickworth crept in lines of fire up the hill, on which the town stood, but he was too far off to hear the faintest murmur from its streets.

Here, he thought, was surely the place to make a

final and successful attempt. Alone under the stars, with not a whisper to disturb him, he must succeed.

He managed, with more than usual facility, to abstract his mind from the present, but when it was free to journey whither it would, instead of soaring into space, it persisted in flying to the room he had left behind him, like a bird to its nest, and all his efforts to dislodge it were fruitless. Finally he abandoned the struggle once more, and reached home, half frozen, to enter in his record:—

“ Out of doors a failure.”

In despite of his hopefulness he was beginning to despair of complete success, and to weary of the continual mental exertion, and bodily privation that his project entailed. At one time he was almost decided to give it up altogether, to put the idea behind him entirely, and to return again to his former pursuits and habits of life.

It seemed a pity, after having suffered so much, and so nearly reached the summit of his ambition, to relinquish all hopes of it; and, as the ruined gambler thinks always that one more chance would infallibly bring him fortune, so Stuart determined to give himself one more trial, to make one great and final effort, and, if then he was still met by failure, to leave it unattempted forever.

For five days he found himself too worn-out mentally to be capable of sufficient self-concentration, but by carefully abstaining from all thoughts on the subject for that period, he brought himself once more into what he felt to be a suitable frame of mind.

On the thirty-first of December, 1852, he retired to

his room about half-past ten, and prepared himself for a last endeavor, a final essay, having previously written in his diary, as he said to himself too truthfully, alas! for the last time :

“Determined to make the final attempt to-night.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE FRUIT RIPENS.

STRANGE as it may appear, John had never considered during the three months through which his experiments had extended, that he was completely ignorant of the consequences success in his attempt might entail.

The idea, when it at last occurred to him, was rather alarming, but he would not permit himself to be frightened from his purpose by a danger which he persisted in assuring himself was trifling. As he could not, however, deny that there was a certain amount of risk, he determined to take every possible precaution.

Before finally commencing operations he sealed up a year's rent for his rooms in a packet which he deposited in a drawer of the cabinet that stood between the windows, leaving on the table a note to his landlady, containing the necessary directions. That being done he felt more at his ease.

Having carefully closed and barred the shutters to

prevent, as far as possible, the penetration of any disturbing noises from without, he sat down, and closing his eyes, proceeded for the last time to endeavor to attract the other's mental atmosphere within his own.

For a long time he met with even less than his usual amount of success. Something seemed to weigh upon him and tie him down to earth. He endeavored vainly to abstract his mind. He first thought that it was the sense of peril, but when he had succeeded in putting all thoughts of that away from him, his spirit still seemed fettered, as with wings of lead.

Giving up the attempt for the moment he devoted his thoughts to the consideration of this hitherto unencountered obstacle. Reviewing all the previous difficulties which he had experienced he could find no one which was of sufficient importance to produce such an unlooked for effect. The only thing to which he could attribute it was the fear of interruption. It was hardly likely that such an influence should affect him so strongly then for the first time, but at all events it was easily remedied.

He securely locked and bolted both the doors, and, as a final and additional assistance, he extinguished the lamp and took his seat in the now absolute darkness and silence of the room.

That he had been right in his conjecture as to the nature of the impediment, was at once proved by the ease with which he now managed to advance through all the preliminary stages of his quest. At once he became conscious of the Presence, and it felt, somehow, nearer to him than it had ever done before.

Previously, though it seemed to be in the room, yet at the same time it was at an immense distance from him, but now it stood apparently at his very elbow.

Encouraged by this improvement, he turned his will-power upon it, as if it were an actual personality, which he was striving to bring under his own influence.

Suddenly a single slender flame of fire shot from the darkness behind him, and sped onwards as if into illimitable depths of space before him. Another followed, and then another, until the whole atmosphere was filled with fleeting lines of light, coming from all directions but all converging to one spot in the fathomless obscurity.

His state of mind at this time was altogether inexplicable. He was conscious of the light, but he knew that he saw without seeing, and thought without thinking. He was, and at the same time, he was not John Stuart. He realized that his mind had at length left its merely earthly surroundings and was floating in the vast void of the unknown. From the height to which he had soared he looked with pity and contempt upon the poor crawling insect he had been ; and yet he was perfectly aware all the while that he was that same John Stuart and no other. He had succeeded in entirely detaching, temporarily at least, his mental atmosphere from its purely carnal confines ; should he now be able to draw to him that other that he sought ?

Presently he saw far, far away a faint sphere of light which appeared to be gradually approaching

him, growing brighter as it came, though he was doubtful at the time whether, in reality, it was moving towards him, or whether he was unwittingly gliding to it.

Thicker and faster the fiery shafts dashed past him and darted into the glowing mass. As it drew nearer, he perceived that it was very bright in the centre, but paled towards its outer edge, which faded away imperceptibly into the darkness, and which seemed to pulsate, contracting and expanding with a regular uniform motion. At length it touched him, and, without producing any sensation, surrounded and enveloped him in a luminous mist. As he approached the brilliant core the light grew more and more vivid around him: strange chords of music, harmonious but without tune, swelled and died away through space, in another moment the nucleus of the sphere touched and entered into his breast.

A wrenching tearing pain seized upon him; for an instant he suffered indescribable torment, and then all became blackly dark.

After an unmeasured space of soundless, sightless night, he became aware of a ringing, as of bells, in his ears. He opened his eyes wearily and saw, shining far above him, a single clear star. He seemed, from his position, to be reclining in a chair, but he could not have been more unconscious of any physical contact had he been seated on a cloud; and, although he was so situated that he could not see the place he was in, he knew it to be the room in which he lived.

He had then failed again! A sense of bitter dis-

appointment, of unreasoning anger filled him at the thought.

He was utterly fatigued and exhausted, and felt far too weak to do more than rest as he was, gazing blankly at the star above him, possessed solely by disgust and irritation at his defeat.

The peal of bells rang out merrily, now loud and clear, now borne faint and far away upon the breeze, but they excited no interest in his mind. He knew them well; they were the Wickworth bells, and were ringing in the New Year.

There was no room for doubt. He had tried for the last time, and had failed once more. All his efforts, all his privations had been wasted and thrown away; never again, he determined with rancorous discontent, would he expend a thought on so futile a task.

He remained thus for a long time, almost enjoying the feeling of utter mental and physical lassitude, too tired to move, too weary to think, aimlessly watching the star.

Suddenly, from it, as it were, a thought plunged into the unthinking serenity of his mind, and shattered it into fragments. How was it that he could see it when, with his own hands, he had shuttered and barred the windows?

His mind worked slowly, and with such difficulty that it took him some time to appreciate the full meaning of this discovery, but when he did understand he trembled with a doubtful emotion. Was it hope or fear?

The next moment another circumstance, that he

had not previously noticed attracted his attention. There was a light of some kind in the room behind him.

Without being conscious of any movement of his own initiation, he found himself on his feet, facing the familiar room.

Familiar? Surely not. It was the same, and yet in many details it was very different. A feeling of sick horror began to creep over him as he gazed. What was this place? Why was this room so well-known and yet so unrecognizable? Where was he? The bells of Wickworth rang cheerfully in his ears, but this was not his home as he had known it. What was the meaning of it all?

The cabinet he knew so well stood in its accustomed place between the windows, but the china vases that had been upon it had disappeared. The windows themselves were curtainless, and the floor uncarpeted. The table was littered, as usual, with books and papers, but the books were curious old-fashioned ones such as he had never possessed, and the writing on the parchments was execrable, very different indeed from his own neat clerkly hand. The lamp was gone, and the room was illuminated by two coarse tallow candles standing in wrought iron candlesticks upon the mantelpiece. This, and the shelves of the oak cupboard which still stood in the corner, were covered with a variety of strangely fashioned vessels of glass and metal. The door of the room beyond, which he had previously locked, stood open, and the furniture within, as far as he could make it out, was unfamiliar.

The rest of the appointments, with one exception,

were equally unknown to him. This exception was a high-backed oak chair, which was a favorite seat of his, and which now stood in front of the fireplace in such a position that its back only was visible to him. The grate was gone, and in place of the black coals of his burned-out fire, a pile of logs blazed cheerily upon the brazen andirons which stood upon the hearth.

Slowly, marking each alteration he encountered, John moved round the room towards the fireplace, and, as he advanced, became aware, first of the feet then of the legs, and finally of the entire figure of a queerly clad man seated in the chair.

His heart leaped within him. He had then succeeded after all! This was the ghost made visible to him at last. This room was assuredly a part of the mental atmosphere of each, one of the links of the chain that had drawn them together.

The man appeared to be wrapped in somewhat uneasy slumbers, and John was able to examine him at his leisure.

He must be, as far as he could judge, between fifty and sixty years of age, and of a vicious and dissipated countenance. His lips were thin and venomous looking, his nose strongly arched, and his eyebrows met above it. His eyes were deeply sunken, and too near together to be pleasant. His head was nearly bald, and he wore a thick gray mustache, fiercely twisted upwards at the ends. His whole face was strangely lined and wrinkled, and he looked altogether uncommonly malevolent and wicked.

The most conspicuous thing about him, however,

at a first casual glance was his yellowness. He appeared to be all yellow.

His face was yellow. The quaintly cut jerkin he wore was yellow; so were his shoes, and his long thin legs were cased in yellow stockings.

John could not help wondering what there could be in common between such a spirit and himself. He concluded, when he had finished his examination, that this was not at all the kind of ghost he had wished to raise, and determined to dismiss him as soon as possible.

The fact of his having brought his faded old-world surroundings with him was embarrassing. But, having summoned him, there could be no difficulty in dismissing him, after an interview which he resolved should be of the shortest.

He was certainly far from an agreeable object as he slept. He seemed to be suffering from a very bad kind of nightmare, as his troubled breathing and stifled moans indicated. His face worked convulsively, and he occasionally grinned horribly, exposing his yellow teeth.

There was something rather weird and exciting in thus standing at his ease, watching this evil-looking spirit with the nightmare.

But John was of a merciful and kindly disposition, and was unwilling to see even so ill-favored a ghost in suffering, when it was in his power to relieve it.

He was about to advance, and rouse him by shaking him by the shoulders when it occurred to him that, this being a phantom, he would be unable to do so, so he spoke instead.

“Who are you?” he said, his voice sounding strangely thin and hollow.

The only effect seemed to be an increase in the throes of the unfortunate being, who now frowned abominably.

“Who are you?” said he, once more, raising his voice.

The only answer was a snort, and a gasp.

Once more he repeated his question, this time with the full force of his lungs.

A convulsion ensued which brought the man in yellow to his feet with a bound, and waking, he fixed his dazed eyes on John, who shuddered with loathing as he met their gaze.

The very whites of his eyes were yellow.

CHAPTER IV.

A FEARFUL DISCOVERY.

FOR some time the man in yellow stood staring at John with half-awakened eyes, and then a wave of diabolical joy swept over his evil countenance.

“At last!” he cried, as he flung his hands above his head with an uncouth gesture, “I have succeeded at last.”

“Succeeded?” said John in surprise, “in what pray?”

“In what quotha!” answered the other, “know you not that? Your very presence here, methinks, should acquaint you.”

“My presence here!” replied John, “I see nothing extraordinary in that. Yours is more remarkable, I should have said.”

“Mine!” said the spirit, “why so? I am ever here.”

“Oh, yes, I know that,” said John, “I have felt your propinquity for a long while.”

“Have you, in good sooth?” was the answer. “That is passing strange. Wherefore did you not appear before, then?”

“Appear! I?” cried John in astonishment. Had he after all his trouble only managed to secure the presence of a ghostly lunatic.

“Verily thyself. Who else, think you?”

“I should have thought that any appearing that had been done was by you.”

“By me!” exclaimed the ghost, flinging himself into the chair, twisting his legs over the arm, and bursting into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

There ran through all this curious creature’s conversation a strain of oddness. It was not so much that he employed words and phrases to which John was unaccustomed, as that his whole tone had a vague, unseizable antique flavor, impossible to convey. It lay, John thought, rather in the intonation and manner of his speech, than in the actual expressions.

“On my faith,” he said at length, “you are but a droll kind of ghost.”

“Ghost!” cried John, seized with sudden fear. “I’m not a ghost.”

The man in yellow stopped short in his laugh, and

leered at him under his eyebrows, with a hateful look of amusement in his yellow eyes.

"Say you so?" he said mockingly, "prithee then, what are you? who are you?"

"I am a man, and my name is John Stuart."

"Were a man, you would say, I opine."

"Am a man," rejoined John, beginning to lose his temper at the other's obstinacy.

"My friend," said he rising, "I think we are becoming somewhat confounded. Are you, in all honest soberness, persuaded that you have not revealed yourself to me?"

"Why, of course I haven't. You have appeared to me."

The ghost stared incredulously for a time, and then turned away with a whistle of perplexity.

"This is marvellous quaint," he said, as he strode impatiently to the other end of the apartment and back. He halted in front of John and began:

"My good sir—"

"But my good sir," interrupted John, "if you are really under the delusion that you have not appeared to me, how the deuce do you account for your presence in my room in that ridiculous fancy dress?"

"Your room!" cried the other, "your room! well, by my head, that passeth all. Your room!" he continued in a tone of withering scorn, "what then make you of that?" and he pointed to the coat-of-arms, with the date and initials, carved above the fireplace, "what make you of that?"

"Pooh!" said John, "that's been there for three hundred years and more."

There never was a more astounded ghost than the man in yellow at that moment. He simply gasped with amazement.

"Hath it so, indeed?" he blurted out, "three hundred years! and what means it, sithens you know so much?"

"Of course, I don't know that now," said John, in disgust.

"Marry, I will be sworn you do not, natheless I do. R. T. signifies Richard Travers, for so am I called; and 1534 was the year in which I builded this house—nineteen years ago."

"Nineteen years! three hundred and nineteen, you mean. Why, man, this is eighteen hundred and fifty-three. Now how do you reconcile your theory that I have appeared to you, with the fact that, on your own showing, you have been dead nearly three hundred years. Hang it all, man, don't you remember *dying*?"

The ghost regarded him with a smile of amused pity.

"He hath lost his wits," he said, half aloud. "He is bereft of reason, a veritable crack-brain. The pity of it, that I should so have striven for three long weary months to catch but a mad ghost at the last!"

By this time John Stuart's head was in a whirl. The persistency of the ghost's assertions, the calm announcement that he, instead of John, had spent three months in summoning a spirit "from the vasty deep," were beginning to unsettle his confidence.

"Excuse me," he said. "Most of your statements

are so unreliable, that you must forgive my expressing a doubt. Have you really been three months seeking me?"

"Faith!" replied Travers, as he claimed to be called, "I have been three months seeking somebody—I would say, some spirit. I doubt me much whether you are quite the kind I wanted, but you must serve my turn, I suppose."

"But I have been three months seeking for you," cried John.

"How could you, being dead?" queried the man.

"But I'm not dead. I never was dead. How can I be dead when I'm alive? I mean——" and he broke down from mere confusion of mind.

"Mark you this, my friend. You know not what you say. T'were better you confessed yourself a dissembling knave, and you cannot bear your part more bravely."

"Oh!" said John with a groan, "this is perfectly ridiculous."

"Well," the man went on, after a pause, "out of your own mouth then I must convict you. Know you where you are?"

"Of course I do," said John hotly. "In Wickworth. Don't be an ass."

"Softly, softly, my master," replied Travers, "Know you then any man in the town?"

"Lots of people, naturally. I am a clerk in the bank."

"The bank! What mean you? I never heard of it, but let that pass. Know you, perchance, Master Francis Greville?"

"Greville? No. I never heard of him."

"Our most worthy mayor, Master William Dunne?"

"No."

"The rector, Sir Richard Harley?"

"I know his tomb in the church."

"Out upon you for a false cozener! He is not dead. His tomb forsooth! Look you, now, how soon you are set down. You profess a certain knowledge of this place, and yet art ignorant of our three most respected citizens. Go to, you are mistaken."

"No, no, no," cried John. "It is you that are mistaken. You and all those others have been dead for years. Only I suppose you've forgotten it."

"Of a truth, you make me laugh. Here stand I, substantial flesh and blood, within mine own demesne, with numberless good gossips in the town, and you would outface me that I am an intruder, and this room yours."

"Substantial!" said John, catching at the idea, "we'll soon see that. If you're a solid living man, as you maintain, grasp my hand."

The man at once extended his hand, but though John's fingers seemed to encircle it they closed on nothing.

"There!" he cried triumphantly. "You see! I can't grasp your hand. You are only air—a phantom—a spirit—a shade."

"Well," said Travers, "you are the most stubborn ghost I ever heard tell of. At your proper request, I try to seize you, and when, as I foresaw, I fail to do so, you would still maintain that I am to blame.

But I will shortly mark your error once for all. See you this chair?"

He raised it in his hand as he spoke, and carried it to the other end of the room.

"Now," he said, with a malicious grin, "bring it back if you are able."

John advanced, and endeavoring to lift it, found his two hands clenched and empty. Again and again he tried, with growing despair at his heart. Gradually the ghastly conviction was gaining strength

"The chair," he said to himself—"like the man, is air."

But with a sudden rush, certainty swept away the feeble barriers he still strove to raise. The man was right—he himself was incorporeal.

With a wild cry of heartbreaking agony he turned and fled from him into the night. The doors were locked and barred, but he was unconscious of them as he passed through them out into the darkness.

He was convinced.

For a long, long time he paced up and down alone in the outer air, in an agony of terror and despair. What was this thing that he had done? What was he? Who was he? Now—how could he get back to his old self and his old life? Why had he not paused before it was too late?

He saw it all now, now when it was past all remedy. In his mad attempt to attract that other's mental atmosphere to his own he had overreached himself, and owing to the other's stronger volition, he had permitted his own atmosphere to be gradually drawn into that of this evil-looking creature, Richard

Travers. The strange sensation which he had so long experienced had arisen from Travers' attempts to put himself in harmony with John, and in his blind folly he had in every way possible assisted him.

He had courted his fate, and instead of making Travers appear to him, he had only succeeded *in making himself appear to Travers.*

He had been the weaker and had allowed himself to be drawn back into the atmosphere of that wretch; from the nineteenth century he had passed into the sixteenth.

Was it still too late? Could he not extricate himself? Surely, surely he could. But how? Without the assistance of Travers it appeared to be impossible. Would he render that assistance? It could only have been idle curiosity that had prompted him. Now that that was gratified, he would undoubtedly release him.

Filled with this new strong hope he returned to the room he had left.

To put the fact with stricter accuracy, he found himself once more in that room, for he was unconscious of any movement. His passage from one spot to another was instantaneous, like the flight of fancy. The earth and all upon it had for him only a visible and audible, not a sensible existence. He could not tell as he stood, whether his feet were on the ground or not. Doors of oak, and walls of stone were to him mere mist. It was a peculiar and unpleasant experience.

Travers had resumed his seat in front of the hearth,

and John where he stood was out of his sight, while his reappearance had necessarily been noiseless, but the other seemed to be at once aware of his presence.

"So you have returned," he said, without moving. "I thought you would."

"Yes," said John sullenly, "I have come back."

"Are you then satisfied?"

"No, I am not. I am extremely dissatisfied."

"Of course, of course. I should say, are you convinced?"

John was about to answer in the affirmative, when a sudden idea occurred to him, and he changed it to a negative.

"Not!" cried Travers. "By'r lady you are hard to please. What is it that gives you pause?"

"Well, you see," said John, endeavoring to control his agitation, "you assert that you made me appear to you. Now I have doubts on that subject, which however you can easily set at rest."

"Indeed. How so?" said Travers, rising and facing him.

"If, as you say, you made me appear," replied John, hope trembling in his voice in spite of himself. "Nothing can be simpler for you than to make me disappear. Do that, and I will own myself defeated."

"Ah!" said Travers, regarding him with a mixture of amusement and admiration. "Excellent i'faith! Excellent!"

A rush of joyful expectation flowed over John. Should he succeed? Would the odious man in yellow fall into the trap?

“Well?” he said impatiently, after a long pause.

“Excellent,” drawled Travers once more. “Excellent—for a ghost. Look you here, my friend,” he continued, suddenly changing his manner to one of fierce abruptness, “think you, you are dealing with a dolt, a fool, an idiot? If so, you are most grievously mistaken. Make you disappear?” He sneered. “Aha, I should think so indeed. Do you suppose that I have been at such pains for nothing? No, no, most worthy ghost, I had need of you, I have got you, and you may swear to it, I mean to keep you.”

For how long, or whither John Stuart wandered in his first passionate despair he never knew. Time and space alike were annihilated for him. He remembered making a vehement appeal to Travers to spare him, to release him; and finding him immovably relentless he had fled once more from his hateful presence into the outer darkness to mourn in solitude.

In his present condition space was nothing to him. Wherever thought could penetrate, or memory return, he could go without let or hindrance. He even revisited Wickworth as he had known it. He met, and addressed himself to dear friends and familiar acquaintances, but they neither heard nor saw him. He wrung his hands, and cried to them in anguish, but they went on unheeding. He stood in their paths, and they passed through him and on, unconscious of his presence. He was no longer in their mental atmosphere. He went hither and thither to all

the spots he knew so well, finding comfort in none, adding fuel rather to the flame that scorched his soul.

He soared up into the unpeopled regions of the air, and passed from one hemisphere to another in a flash of thought. A feeling of exultation began to glow within him, he felt almost satisfied with his lot. Here he determined he would remain. If he might not go back to his own place, at all events that abominable creature should get no benefit from his misfortune. He would never return to the detested presence of Richard Travers.

Even as he made the resolution he felt some invisible tie dragging him back to earth. Vainly he struggled; he could not wrestle with the impalpable. Swiftly and surely he was swept downwards and onwards, as helpless as the thistledown upon the breeze, until he found himself once more before the one being he wished most to avoid.

"Come!" said he, with an angry scowl." A truce to this trifling. It is meet you learn to acknowledge your master. I have need of you, and can waste no more time in idle dallying."

"You are no master of mine," cried John furiously. "I don't care a rap for you or your purpose. Don't reckon on any assistance of mine. I refuse to obey you."

Travers burst into a shriek of mocking laughter, and John, with a cry of rage, sprang at his throat. He might as well have tried to grasp the summer wind.

"A most high-spirited spectre, upon my word,"

sneered Travers. "Be calm, I pray you, and listen to reason."

"Reason!" answered John bitterly, but he saw that resistance was useless.

"I have a use for you," continued the other. "as I have said already. And the sooner you resign a contest, which is to no purpose, the better it will be for you and me. You are completely in my power, and cannot even stir from this spot, and it be against my wishes. If you doubt me, try."

John did try with all his might, but it was unavailing. He knew if he could but think some of other place he would at once find himself there, but he was unable to do so. His will was bound down and crushed out by the man before him.

"I submit," he said at length, mournfully enough. "You are my master. By what diabolical means you obtained such an influence over me I cannot understand, but I acknowledge that you possess it."

"So!" cried Travers triumphantly. "Now we can commune at our leisure. My mastery over you, and I mistake not, is full as much your work as mine. Some months ago I began, with set purpose, the endeavor to hold communion with a spirit. It was weary work, I strove long and sorely, but I have succeeded at last; I have succeeded at last." And he rubbed his hands, and chuckled.

"Why, that is my case," said John.

"Perdy! I thought as much. I sought for you, and you for me. When at length we foregathered, we were like unto two men, hauling at the opposing ends of a rope. And you had been the stouter I

should have been fain to go to you. By my good fortune I was the stronger, and you could not choose but come to me. Now here lies the point—will you, of your good will, lend me your aid, or must I constrain you?”

“What do you wish me to do? It is useless to resist.”

“Marry, well said. You seem to be a proper wight after all. What boots it to contend? It can be of no avail. Strive as you may you cannot prevail against me. Were you to flee to the uttermost depths of the sea, or the furthest star in the firmament, I have but to will it, and on the instant you are here. Now far be it from me to make your bondage more irksome than is needful. As you now are you cannot hope to get much satisfaction out of existence. To all intent, you have none. You are to all save me as invisible and intangible as the air they breathe.”

John buried his face in his hands and groaned.

“Nay, nay,” continued Travers. “Let not your spirit be dismayed. You might well be in a more parlous state. If you show yourself willing, you shall find in me a kindly master. To show you at once that I intend no ill by you, know that it is my first purpose to provide you with a body.”

“With what?” cried John in amazement.

“With a body,” was the cool rejoinder.

“Mark you this,” continued Travers, after he had given John time to consider his extraordinary proposal. “As you are at present, you can be of no assistance to me or any man. I want an actual pres-

ence, not a ghost. You, I trow, would be more at ease if you possessed a bodily form. It is in my power to supply you with one. Are you so minded?"

John hesitated for some time. Was this some snare? To what would he commit himself if he accepted this strange offer? He could not, he concluded, be in a worse situation than he was in then. On the whole, he thought he would submit; but he resolved first to discover as much of the other's plans as possible.

"I don't understand," he said. "What sort of a body?"

"Oh, have no fear. There is no fault to find on that score. Young, lusty, and one, moreover, that will fit you like a glove. Would you like to see it?"

He talked as if it ever a question of a suit of clothes.

"No, no," said John, hurriedly. Never mind about that. The thing is—what do you want me to do, if I consent?"

"I have but one purpose for you to fulfil, and one, methinks, which few young men would cavil at. All I ask of you is to wed a fortune."

"Marry a fortune? But suppose she objects?"

"She will not. In truth she has consented heretofore."

"Consented! Then does she know——?"

"No, no. Permit me to elucidate. The body of which I crave your kind acceptance, is that of my nephew, Sir Walter Carlingford, who was betrothed to the aforesaid fortune. Unhappily, Walter has lived rather a gay life, and so piteously shattered

his constitution that—in short he has no longer any use for his body, so why should not you profit by it?”

“But is that quite fair to the young lady?”

“By my troth she need never know the difference. In sooth, if on so brief an acquaintance, I do not misjudge you, she will gain much advantage by the exchange. For Walter—albeit my nephew—was ever mighty wild.”

John was puzzled and confused. He tried to think the matter out seriously, but could not. A proposition so unusual would be calculated to unsettle the steadiest mind. It was difficult to consider it calmly and rationally. To regard a new body with the cool impartial judgment which the choice of a new house would call for is a faculty given to few. It is questionable, if it were possible for us to select our own bodies for ourselves, instead of being thrust into one without ceremony, whether many of us would be gainers.

“What I fail to understand—” said John, finally, “is why you take so much interest in the matter.”

“Sheer kindness of heart,” answered Travers, not without hesitation. “I am concerned for the poor maiden, and should grieve to see her happiness miscarry when it can be avoided with so much ease.”

John still hesitated. He was unconvinced. The man did not look like one to be influenced by so disinterested a motive, and there was a gleam in his yellow eyes which belied his words.

“Come, come,” said Travers, roughly, “we waste time in irresolution. I cannot see what fairer proffer a ghost could wish. And remember—” he went on

with a hideous expression of malignity, "I do not ask your consent, save as a matter of form, and to save trouble. You shall dearly abide it, if you refuse."

For an instant longer John reflected. He fully believed that the man had the power he claimed, and it would perhaps be as well to appear to yield gracefully to the inevitable. He was helpless as he was. He would certainly be more in condition to cope with the other when he was on more equal terms with him. It is foolish to quarrel with a man you cannot injure. And if, as John did not doubt, there was some concealed villainy in the proposed plan, he would be better able to combat and defeat it as the false Sir Walter than as the disembodied John Stuart.

"I consent," he said. "What am I to do?"

"Good, good!" cried Travers, leaping into the air, his face convulsed with a horrible exultation. "I thought you would see what was best for you. You shall not repent it, I warrant you. Young, handsome, rich, you shall be happy as the day is long."

"Yes, yes," said John, disgusted at the extravagance of his demonstrations of joy. "What am I to do?"

"Do?" answered Travers. "Rest where you are, and set your gaze on mine."

John did so. Travers stood before him, his hands outstretched towards him, his lips tightened, and his brows contracted. As John gazed into his eyes they seemed to glow with internal fire. Gradually the darkness seemed to gather round him, and wrap him

like a fog in which those two eyes burned alone, Slowly the darkness deepened, and the fiery orbs seemed to retreat further and further into the distance. They shone at last for a moment like two remote stars, lessened, faded, and vanished.

CHAPTER V.

MIXED FEELINGS.

WHEN John returned to consciousness, the chill light of a winter's morning illuminated the room. Some hours at least must have passed since he lost himself in the enfolding darkness.

His first sensation was one of extreme languor; he was aware of a racking headache, and his limbs were as cold and as heavy as lead. He felt no inclination, even if he possessed the power, to move; he was content to lie and enjoy the sense of restfulness which overpowered even the feeling of sickness which oppressed him.

The curtain at the head of the bed was drawn forward, as if to exclude the draught, and the only part of the room visible to him was that which lay directly before him. In his half-waking condition he forgot the events of the previous night, and was puzzled at the growing joy he experienced on realizing the fact that the room was his own.

The grain of the panelling at the foot of his bed

had been strangely contorted during growth, and he had often amused himself, in the delicious moments between waking and rising, by discovering figures and faces in its varying curves. It stood before his eyes now, and vaguely, unthinkingly, he let his fancy wander as usual. Generally he had been able to find in it what shapes he would, but now, in spite of all his efforts, one face alone was pictured, which he was unable to banish. It was a hideous, mocking, evil face, and he wondered in a dim uncertain way where he had seen it, and why it haunted him so

By degrees, the occurrences of the past night revived in his memory, and he knew it. It was Richard Travers, the man in yellow. But with what feelings of exultation, of overwhelming joy he regarded it now. He was safe, safe in his own room, and his sufferings were past with the hideous nightmare that had given birth to them. The bodyless John Stuart, the man in yellow were no more than visions of the night.

He was about to rise, when he remembered that it was the first of January, and holiday at the Bank, and he turned over to enjoy that priceless boon, an extra hour in bed.

As he lay thinking over his dream, he was astonished at the vividness of the impression it had made on him. Richard Travers with his horrible yellow face, and strange yellow garments was as actual to him as if he had really known him. His own bitter despair at the discovery of his unsubstantiality was as real an experience as any of his waking life. He could see his room now, the same, yet so curiously

altered. He shuddered as he thought of the misery he had suffered.

“Thank heaven!” he cried, “it was nothing but a dream.”

Presently, as he grew more wakeful, he became sensible of a curious confusion of identity. Visions of places he had never seen, and persons he had never known flitted, half-formed, through his mind; visions which were almost memories but which vanished when he tried to grasp them. One sweet, pleading girl’s face rose again and again, though he knew he had never seen it, and could remember no picture like it. It was as if he had the power of recalling some one else’s memories.

His head ached so that thought and sensation were alike difficult and confused, but he was dimly conscious of a discomfort not attributable to the sickness from which he suffered. His limbs seemed only partially obedient to his will. He seemed to be afflicted not with paralysis, but with a sort of muscular aphasia. Often, when he intended to make one movement, he found himself unconsciously performing another quite different. His eyes seemed closer together than they used to be. A horror seized him—was he going mad?

His mind seemed healthy enough. He went without difficulty over the events of the previous day. His breakfast, office hours, evening walk, and parting with his best friend, were all as clear as noon, until the moment when he sat himself down in the darkness to make his last attempt.

Here he halted with a sudden shock of fearful

wonder. Why was he in that room, not in the other? How had he got to bed?

When he came to think, it was simple enough. He had overstrained his nerves, been found unconscious, and been carried to his bed, where he had suffered, for how long he knew not, from some brain disease, from which he was now recovering.

It was a complete and satisfactory explanation of all his singular sensations, but it was no sooner formed than shattered. Shattered by a fact so slight and trivial that it would have been ludicrous had it not been so all-important.

The curtain at the head of the bed was unknown to him.

In an instant he seized it and dragged it aside. With a cry of horror he fell back upon his pillow. The room was his own, but the furniture was strange and new. Close to his hand stood an oaken chair on which was a tumbled heap of oddly-fashioned clothes which were not his. Against the wall opposite to him was a tall bureau which he had never seen before, and by it hung a rich Venetian mirror, far different from his modest looking-glass. It was no dream.

For a long time he was completely stupefied by the shock he had sustained. He could only moan to himself over and over again :

“It was no dream. It was no dream.”

A faint ray of hope presently dawned within him. This was perhaps merely a slight return of his illness, an illusion which time and calmness would dispel. Mastering his emotion with an effort, he lay with his

eyes closed until he could endure it no longer, but when he opened them, the room was still the same.

It was no hallucination.

Hastily reviewing the details of the preceding night, his inability to grasp the chair recurred to him. How then could he feel the curtain he still clutched?

Fear lent him strength, he sprang from the bed and rushing to the mirror recoiled in affright.

The face reflected there was not his own. Instead of the round fresh face, ruddy complexion, and brown curly hair that had been his, he saw a thin oval face, with an aquiline nose, and black straight hair. The eyes were too close together, and the whole countenance, though undeniably handsome, wore a sensual dissipated look which shocked John's somewhat rigid mind. And this was the mask he was doomed to wear. Under this doubtful guise he was fated to appear in future before his fellow men. With a groan, part rage, part terror, he fell upon the bed.

His agony was terrible. He was mad with grief and despair. In the uncontrollable frenzy which possessed him he tore at the bed clothes with his teeth and hands, cursing himself and the day he had been born, the insane folly that had brought him to such a strait, and the foul spirit whose co-operation had drawn him to this fate.

When by his efforts, he had exhausted the frail body, weakened by illness, which was now his, his mind still raged in bitter hopeless revolt against his destiny. In vain he sought some channel of escape, he was beyond help. In his bodyless condition he

had been unable to resist ; now that he was irretrievably imprisoned in this hateful form, he was still more securely trapped. He had now, it was true, the powers of offense or defense, but it was doubtful whether it would benefit him in any way to kill Travers, or himself, or both.

What he resented most, when his first rage had expended itself, was the feebleness of the form he occupied. That he, who had taken every possible measure to preserve his health and strength, and who had consequently never known a day's real sickness in his life, should be compelled to endure at second hand the suffering and weakness arising from the follies and crimes of another was unbearable. And yet he had no means of redress.

In his blind infatuation he had sown ; with bitter tears of remorse and repentance he must reap the harvest.

He was roused at length from his stupor by the sound of a closing door, and looking up, his loathing eyes lighted on the yellow visage of Richard Travers.

"Ah !" said he, "I rejoice to perceive that you are better."

"Have I been ill then ? " asked John.

"In truth you have ; miserably, woefully afflicted. Time was," he continued, in the silkiest of tones, "time was, I feared that I should lose you, so shortly after I had found you. 'Twould have been a grievous misfortune, would it not ?"

"How long have I been ill ? " said John, taking no notice of his mocking question.

“Let me see. This is the seventeenth day of February. That makes it, as near as may be, four months.”

“Four months?” cried John, “what rubbish! It’s barely seven weeks.”

“For you, yes, yes,” replied Travers placidly, “seven weeks for you, ’tis true, but you bear not in mind poor Walter’s part. But you are better now. That is well, that is well.”

“I wish I had died,” groaned John, “why didn’t you let me die.”

“Hush, hush,” said Travers, quite unmoved, “you are unthankful. But now if you feel strong enough, let us hold converse, my dear Walter.”

“My name’s not Walter,” said John fiercely. “I am John Stuart, as you know.”

Travers shook his head pityingly and sighed.

“Poor fellow!” he murmured. “Poor fellow! Still distraught. Of a truth, my dear Walter, you must endeavor to combat this singular delusion. Bethink you of the evil effect upon the good neighbors. What should they think when, having known you for many a day as Sir Walter Carlingford, you affirm that you are plain John Stuart. You must dismiss this vain conceit, you must indeed.”

“I will not,” cried John. “I *am* John Stuart, and you know it, you gloating demon.”

Travers, still smiling amiably, took a seat by the bedside.

“Well,” he said. “Sith we are alone, I will confess, for the nonce, that you are. But what then? What good can that do you? I can bring forward

an hundred trusty witnesses to depone that you are no other than Sir Walter. You may plainly foresee the outcome of your sole, unsupported assertion to the contrary. They would conclude that you were mad."

"But I won't, for a moment, consent to such an imposition. I insist upon being released."

"Good lack, good lack," said Travers, affecting pained surprise. "I thought that we had disposed of all that seven weeks ago. I told you then I would not disenthral you, if I could. Now I cannot, an I would. 'Twas by your own consent you took that form, it is out of my power now to relieve you of it."

John groaned aloud. The truth of Travers, remarks was only too palpable. Whether he was really as incapable of freeing him from his bondage, as he pretended, or not, he manifestly had no intention of doing so, and it was perfectly certain that any denial on his part of his identity, would only lead to the result Travers mentioned. To resist further was useless.

"What deviltry—" he said at length—"do you require of me?"

"We can discuss that anon, though, as I told you aforetime, there is no deviltry, it is innocence itself. Your task is to get well as speedily as you may. We will assign a month to that purpose. I doubt not that with your healthy disposition that will be time enough. During that month I intend to give myself up to acquainting you, as far as possible, with the facts of your past life, the details of which, owing to your recent severe indisposition, have, I fear me

much, entirely escaped you. A curious and interesting case of loss of memory. By great luck I am your only near kinsman."

John writhed internally in impotent opposition to this complete identification of himself with Sir Walter, but it was vain to expostulate. Travers, having once for all clearly explained the situation, received all further remonstrance with a bland smile or a pitying shrug of the shoulders. He was obviously determined to treat any such assertion on John's part as a sign of insanity in his nephew; and John, with fury at his heart, had no choice but to acquiesce. He must pass for Sir Walter, mad or sane, and the latter was at all events to be preferred.

While he had been thus reconciling himself, however unwillingly, to his fate, Travers had been mixing something in a glass which he now brought to the bedside.

"Drink that," he said, "'twill serve to cool and refresh you. Oh, fear nothing," he added with a laugh, noticing John's look of doubt, "it is no poisoned draught. You are too needful to me for that."

John drank it without a word, and it seemed to put new life into his parched veins.

"That is well," said Travers exultingly, "already you look better. Right soon you will be restored and on your feet again. And now, if you so will, we can commence our little lesson forthwith."

"No, no!" cried John despairingly, "not now, leave me—for God's sake—leave me to myself awhile. If you have no mercy, show me, at least, a little pity, and go!"

CHAPTER VI.

FIRST FRUITS.

AT the end of three weeks John felt sufficiently recovered to crawl with help from one room to the other. During this time Travers was his only and constant attendant. In fact, the burning desire that possessed John to escape occasionally from this unpleasant companionship had no slight effect in hastening his convalescence, for, though he could not but admit that his devotion was unexceptionable, yet he could never bring himself to do more than endure his presence, and could never look upon him without a return of the loathing he had experienced at the first sight of his evil, yellow face.

John's condition was, at this time, indeed truly pitiable, for in addition to the physical sufferings accruing from his fevered state, he was surrounded at all hours by petty annoyances which served to keep his disordered nerves in perpetual irritation. As long as he was confined to his bed, these were mainly confined to the coarseness of the bed coverings; the nauseous ingredients of the medicines which Travers in his character of physician, forced upon him; and the want of delicacy in the small quantity of nourishment which he painfully compelled himself to swallow. But when he succeeded in rising, life became a hideous series of discomforts. The absence of num-

berless small accommodations, which he had been accustomed to regard as necessities, struck him at every turn. From the moment when he engaged for the first time in a helpless struggle with the garments of which the fashion, method of putting on, and even of fastening were alike unknown to him, until he stretched his aching limbs uneasily upon the hard uncushioned seat, with no absorbing romance procurable to distract his gloomy thoughts, he passed through a period of intense, though paltry, vexations.

He managed to obtain some relief from the miseries of his position in the exercise of a power to torment Travers which he discovered himself to possess. He felt no scruples on the score of ingratitude, as he knew perfectly well that Travers' attentions were devoted more to his own interests than to his patient's.

His system was extremely simple. He resolutely refused to listen to any information regarding Sir Walter's past life. In vain Travers pleaded and argued, he was deaf to all expostulation, and when, in despite of John, he insisted upon relating various details of the past, he would stop his ears, or carefully refrain from paying any attention. It was joy unspeakable to him to watch Travers struggling against the growing irritation which he always endeavored to conceal under a manner of supreme blandness.

Before John had been up and about a week, however, an event occurred which convinced him that if his painful position was to be endurable at all he must eventually submit to Travers' tutoring.

On the ninth of March, having, with his usual difficulty, got into the unaccustomed garments which

he was compelled by circumstances to wear, he crept to the front room, and sank exhausted by the effort into an elbow chair.

Travers, having seen him safely bestowed, had left him to attend to some business in the town, but John had not been long alone, almost enjoying the pleasing weakness of convalescence, when the door burst open and a little fat old man, with a red face, white hair, and beard trimmed to a peak, was, as it were, blown into the room on the whirlwind of his own excitement.

"Aha, my dear Sir Walter!" cried the new-comer, seizing his hand and shaking it enthusiastically, "once more among us. That is well. I am glad, exceeding glad."

"Thanks awfully," said John wearily, adding to himself, "I wonder who the deuce this is."

The old gentleman bubbled over for some time with delight and congratulation, until a sudden thought struck him.

"By the way," he said, "hath Bob been to see you yet?"

"Yes," replied John, without thinking, "oh, yes, he's been."

"Was he rejoiced to behold you once more?"

"Rejoiced!" said John, fairly committed, "he was delighted."

"Marry, I would be sworn he was."

"Yes," John continued, not content to let well alone, "he said the nicest things about it."

The old man's face fell, and he regarded John wonderingly.

"I crave your pardon," he said hesitatingly. "Did I rightly understand you to say that, Bob ——?"

"Yes, yes," replied John, seeing that he had blundered in some way, but unable to help himself, "he said the most charming and sympathetic things."

The wondering eyes grew rounder than ever.

"But, fair sir," he stammered, "he could not, being as he is a dog."

John felt that he had fairly put his foot into the net, but he was bound to try to wriggle out somehow.

"Of course," he said, awkwardly, "I know that. I mean he seemed to say them. Wagged his tail, and barked, and——all that kind of thing, don't you know? as if he would have said them if he could. I was only speaking metaphorically."

The old gentleman looked as if he did not know what "metaphorically" meant, which was probably the case, but he discreetly changed the subject by saying:

"Mary will be heartily delighted at your recovery."

John was too careful now, after his last failure, to blunder any further, until he was sure what Mary was, so he merely nodded assent. The stranger seemed surprised at John's indifference, but he rattled on:

"She bade me be sure to convey to you her fond love, and I had speech with you."

"Thank you," said John. Mary was evidently a woman.

"She is fairly dying to see you, poor maid. You must visit her as soon as you can go abroad."

"Thanks. Oh, yes, of course I shall." Mary seemed of an impulsive disposition, and lived apparently in some foreign country.

"Shall I bear her your love in return?" asked his companion, not without indignation, as if he had expected the proposition to come from John.

"Oh, yes!" said he indifferently, "I suppose that will be the right thing."

The little man seemed very much upset about something, and changed the subject once more.

For some time, by the exercise of a prodigious amount of ingenuity, John avoided entangling himself further, wishing in his heart that Travers, whom he had previously done his best to elude, would come to his relief. Presently he was brought up short by the explosion of another conversational bombshell.

"Well bethought on," said his visitor. "No further tidings have been obtained anent the fate of your friend Roger Helmsley."

"Oh, really," said John, feeling that the ice was getting pretty thin again.

"Not a word. 'Tis wondrous strange."

"Very," answered John, wondering who Roger Helmsley was, and hoping that the old man would confine himself to generalities.

"I am mighty puzzled regarding it."

"It is rum," said John, adding unguardedly, "I often wonder where he's gone."

"That ought to be safe," he fondly thought.

"Gone!" cried his unwelcome guest. "By'r lady, he is dead."

This was a facer, and John made no remark.

"Knew you not that?" said his companion after a pause.

"Oh, yes, of course. I remember now."

"Of course you do. You must. Now I think on it, you first found him."

"Of course I did," said John, considering it useless to deny it, but wishing that the earth would open, and swallow this persistent questioner.

"I have never as yet learned the true facts of that matter," resumed his tormentor. "I wish you would relate them to me now."

John groaned in spirit. What on earth was he to say? If he attempted to invent a story, he was certain to bungle at the first start, and yet the other's air of hushed expectancy precluded the possibility of dropping the subject.

"Well, you see," he stammered, he was—er—was—lost. And—er—I—er—I found him, that's all."

"Yes, yes. I know. But where? That is what I would be certain of—where?"

"Well," said John in despair, seeing there was no help for him, "You know the Bank."

"The Bank!"

"Yes. The Wickworth and County Bank. Close to the Police Station. You know?"

"What mean you?"

A flash of inspiration occurred to John—there was no Bank there now.

"I mean the embankment—the railway embankment—close to the railway station."

The old man rubbed his forehead with such an air of hopeless perplexity that John saw he was wrong

again. He made a last desperate attempt to extricate himself."

"I was passing the gas works——"

"The gas works?" gasped his puzzled interlocutor. "What be those? I was given to understand that it was on Cricnell Common."

"Of course it was," cried John with an assumed air of reckless gayety. "I was just coming to that. I was crossing Cricnell Common when I met—met—" He had forgotten the man's name. "Met—him." He concluded lamely.

"Met him? when he was dead?"

"Dead, of course he was. Dead as a doornail. When I say met him, I mean came across him."

"Found him," suggested the other.

"Well, I said so," answered John irritably. "Found him."

"Was he much hurt?" asked the little man.

"Hurt? Why he was dead, man."

"Yes, I know. I should say, was he grievously wounded?"

"Grievously? Well I should rather think so. He was killed."

He felt a certain amount of pleasure, in spite of his troubles, in turning the tables to some extent on his persecutor.

"Yes, yes. Did he seem sorely injured?"

"Rather; his head was blown completely off."

This reckless statement finished it. The old man rose with a scared expression, under the unmistakable conviction that Sir Walter Carlingford was a raving maniac.

"It is the first time that ever I heard of a man's head being blown off by a stab in the back," he said shortly.

"Hat, I said," cried John despairingly, "his hat was blown completely off."

At this unfortunate juncture Travers entered the room.

His face lengthened considerably as he saw the old gentleman fuming and wiping his brow, and as John sank back in his chair with a sigh of relief, he hastened to salute the surprised and indignant visitor.

"How fare you, Master Merrill?" he cried with well feigned pleasure. "So you have come to speak with our poor Walter. That is most kind of you, most kind and thoughtful, on my life."

He led the other away to the window, where they stood for some time in eager whispered conference. John overheard occasional snatches of their conversation :

"Bank—Helmsley—head blown off—break off the match—utterly distraught."

But he was too worn out by his late efforts, and too glad to be released, to pay much attention.

"No, no," broke out Travers angrily, at length, "I will not hear of it."

More muttered expostulation and argument followed which was concluded by the old gentleman saying doubtfully :

"Well, well, it may be so. I will take your word for it."

"It is so, I protest," answered Travers, as they returned to John.

“It is but a thing of the moment, and will pass away. Mark you, our poor dear Walter has been very ill indeed, and is not yet thoroughly recovered. One of his most distressing symptoms at present is his complete and utter loss of recollection. In sooth, it was quite a long time ere he could recall his own name, but he will soon be well. Returning strength, fair sir, returning strength will do it, I am something of a leech, and I know.”

“Well, I must take my leave,” said Merrill, as he seemed to be named, still looking unconvinced, and carefully keeping the table between himself and John, “Fare you well, Sir Walter, shall I bear your love to Mary?”

“Oh, yes, yes, certainly,” said he.

“Will you not indite her a brief billet?” he suggested, “she would, I know, be vastly pleased if you would.”

“No, no,” said Travers, interfering, “he is far too weak at present. Another time, worthy sir, another time.”

“Who in the name of goodness is that old fool?” cried John furiously, as soon as the outer door had closed behind the departing visitor.

“That,” said Travers grimly, “that is Master James Merrill.”

“And who the deuce is Mary?”

“Mary is his daughter. The damsel you are betrothed to.”

CHAPTER VII.

“LOVE IN A MIST.”

ON the afternoon of March the seventeenth, the weather being remarkably mild for the season, John ventured to taste the fresh air for the first time since the fatal conclusion of his experiments.

Taught by the results of his disagreeable interview with James Merrill, he had, much to Travers' delight, submitted himself unwillingly to his instructions in that past which was now his by right of inheritance, and had quickly learned all that his tutor was able or chose to tell him.

As he paced the walks of the garden which lay behind the house, for he did not yet dare to go into the town, he pondered in his mind the lesson he had learned.

Sir Walter Carlingford had at an early age been left an orphan with a considerable fortune, under the guardianship of his uncle, Richard Travers. When he attained his majority he betook himself to London. What happened to him while there his uncle either did not know or did not care to reveal. He confined himself to stating that after some years Sir Walter had returned to Wickworth, broken in health and, which was to Travers of greater importance, in fortune. Attracted by the wealth of Mary Merrill, a neighbor-

ing heiress, he had laid close siege to her, and after some delay had obtained the promise of her hand—and its contents. Unfortunately, his previous dissipation had so undermined his constitution that shortly after that desirable consummation he had fallen into a decline, to which he had eventually succumbed, as John and Travers alone knew.

Having wrapped himself in a cloak, which he thought a most unmanageable garment and a very inefficient substitute for a great coat, John wandered slowly on, thinking sometimes of his acquired past, sometimes with bitter anguish of his real one. He was getting by degrees accustomed to the afflictions of his new surroundings; but no amount of usage would ever, he felt sure, reconcile him to them. He revolted still as furiously and as futilely as ever against his false position.

His steps led him in time to the far end of the garden, from which spot the house was concealed by a thick grove of trees and shrubs, already partially clothed with the fresh verdure of spring.

He was about to retrace his steps, when he was in some degree aroused from his reverie by a soft voice somewhere close at hand.

“Hist!” it said, in suppressed tones, “Walter!”

John paused for a moment, and then resumed his walk. It was undoubtedly no concern of his. But as he moved away, the voice, though still carefully lowered, followed his retreating form with a touch of appeal in its tones.

“Walter, Walter, do not leave me thus,” it wailed.

He suddenly remembered himself. He was Walter

now, and the entreaty was addressed to him. Turning, he looked in the direction whence the sound proceeded, and saw peering over a gap in the hedge which bounded the garden the face of a girl.

She was quite young, apparently not more than seventeen, but remarkably beautiful. Her eyes were large and blue, and were made only more charming by their anxious expression and by the tears with which they were fast filling. Her hair of a rich golden-brown color was cunningly tucked up under a hood. Her mouth was like a rosebud, almost babyish in its childlike simplicity; her lips, half parted in her grief at the supposed Walter's neglect, revealing the whitest of teeth. Her nose was delicately retroussé, and her cheeks round and rosy.

"Now, who on earth is this?" was John's reflection, as he approached the delicious vision.

"Oh, Walter!" she cried, with a rising sob, as he drew near, "I feared that you were about to leave me. Will you not speak to me?"

"Speak to her! Of course I will," thought John. "Who could resist such a temptation?" But it would certainly have made matters easier if he had only known who she was. There was no one at all in Sir Walter's past answering to this innocent creature, unless she were Mary, which did not somehow seem likely to him. The face was vaguely familiar to him, though how or why he could not for the life of him discover.

"Wherefore do you stay so far from me?" she said, plaintively, as he stood irresolute. "You were not wont to do so."

“What,” John wondered, “was Sir Walter’s customary proceeding on these occasions?”

“See!” she cried, kindly but unconsciously relieving him of the difficulty, “I have kept the gap open all the while you have been ill.”

Following her lead he found a very practicable opening into the lane in which she stood, through which he scrambled without difficulty.

“Oh, Walter!” she said, clasping her little hands and looking up into his face with an expression of pure delight. “Dear Walter, I am so glad that you are better. You are better, are you not?”

“Yes. Oh, yes; thanks, I am much better,” John answered.

“I have missed you so sadly, dearest. I have come here whenever I could, always hoping to see you, always returning disappointed; but you have come to me at last—at last.”

“She slipped her arm through his, as if to prevent his leaving her again, and led him gently down the lane which curved away before them.

John was absorbed in wondering who she could be, while she prattled merrily, disclosing in every speech her pure innocent love for this man who knew her not. Willingly would John have reciprocated, but in his ignorance as to her identity, he did not dare to venture beyond the merest commonplace.

“Walter, dear,” she said, presently, pressing the arm she held, “I am cold.”

“Yes?” he said, vaguely. “It is cold, very cold. Perhaps you had better go home.”

She snatched her arm from his, and stamped her

little foot on the ground, the tears welling up into her angry eyes.

“Is that all you have to say to me?” she cried.

“Well,” said John, wondering in what he had offended, “it seems to me about the best remedy.”

“I see what it is,” she went on, fiercely and rapidly, “you are wearied of me. You want to be rid of me. I have become a burden to you. You have ceased to love me. Oh, Walter, Walter,” she cried, bursting into tears, “do not desert me, or I shall die.”

“No, no,” exclaimed John, fervently clasping her in his arms. “My darling, I do love you.”

It was, perhaps, hardly a justifiable proceeding, but John was rapidly losing his heart to this lovely creature, and it was only fair, he reflected, that he should enjoy the sweets as well as the bitters of his unwilling impersonation.

“Then wherefore do you not offer to share your cloak with me as you were wont to do?”

John hesitated for a moment. It seemed hardly honest to take so much advantage of her innocent delusion; moreover he had not yet got used to his new apparel, and still felt awkward about what he considered the insufficient covering of his legs. However it was impossible to resist when he gazed into her eyes, and saw her little lip beginning to quiver, so he recklessly flung open his cloak, and folded it round her as she slipped to his side.

As they strolled on wrapped in the same cloak, John could not deny that it was extremely pleasant. The only drawback lay in the fact that the cloak kept sliding either off his shoulder, or off hers. After he

had replaced it for the twentieth time, she said timidly :

“Do you not think ’twould be wiser to put your arm round me, and so keep it up?”

There was no help for it, so he did so, and it certainly answered the purpose admirably. As she crept close to his side, to admit of this new arrangement, her arm glided gently round him, and they walked on in the most loving embrace.

John’s scruples had vanished long since. Though he was, he felt, in masquerade, yet he was rapidly falling in love on his own account with this sweet artless girl.

As he looked down upon the loving face turned up to his he remembered that it was the one which he had seen in his first waking visions, the morning that he recovered consciousness. Presently he saw her eyes gradually fill with tears.

“Walter,” she said pitifully, “what ails you?”

“Ails me?” he said wondering, “nothing. What makes you think that?”

“You do love me still?” she said, answering, womanlike, his question with another.

“Love you, my darling?” cried John, “now and always.”

“Then why don’t you kiss me?”

It was not in human nature to resist; John did not attempt to do so. He stooped and kissed her again and again, as she clung to him, laughing through her tears.

“I was so lonely without you,” she said after a time, “I thought you would never come back. Oh

if you had died ! But you are well now, are you not, quite, quite well ?”

“Yes,” said John earnestly, “I am quite well now.”

“You are changed though. You are much colder to me than you used to be.”

“No, no, I am not,” he answered, taking the easiest method of convincing her to the contrary. His joy at his success, however, was doomed to sharp and sudden extinction. Too much happiness is not good for man, and here his evil fate stepped in.

“Wherefore do you no longer call me by my old pet name ?” she asked innocently.

Fortunately she cast down her eyes as she spoke, or the expression of horror which crossed John’s face must have alarmed her, and perhaps revealed part of the truth to her. John was completely overwhelmed by her remark. What was the old pet name ? who was she ? was she Mary Merrill ? Even if she was, the knowledge of that fact would be of no assistance in this case. His ready wit suggested a course to him, just as the pause was becoming embarrassing.

“Oh,” he said airily, “I have got a much better name than that. In future I mean to call you Blossom.”

The little arm that encircled him gave him a perceptible squeeze.

“Yes, yes,” she cried, with sparkling eyes, “that is much nicer. I think that Blossom is far prettier than Bud, don’t you ?”

“Oh, yes,” said he, not without some twinges of remorse, at deceiving her, “certainly, much prettier.”

"Bud," he thought, "that was the name, was it?—Why Bud?" he turned it over in his mind, but could not find any connection between Bud and Mary. And if she was not Mary, he did not know who she could be.

"Where is your uncle?" she asked suddenly.

"Out," he answered.

"There is no fear of his returning, is there?"

"None at all. He's in the country somewhere, miles away."

"That is well," said she, with a sigh of relief.

"Why dear?"

"Why?" she cried, looking up at him in surprise, "it would be fatal, you know, should he surprise us in converse. You yourself told me so."

"Yes," said he, "of course it would."

Sir Walter's conduct began to appear to him in blackest hues. What a villain he must have been, if he had meditated harm to one so innocent.

"Moreover," she continued, "what would my mother say?"

"Ah!" said John, solemnly shaking his head, as if the idea had occurred to him for the first time, as indeed it had, "Ah! what indeed?"

The afternoon had passed, and twilight was already deepening, when they returned to the part of the lane in which they had first met.

"Well," she said with a sigh, "I must be gone."

"No, no," he cried clasping her in his arms, and pressing his lips to hers, "No, no. Not yet."

"You will always love me, Walter," she murmured

faintly, as she reclined unresisting on his breast, "you will never leave me?"

"Never, dearest, never, I swear."

She released herself gently from his embrace, and turned to go, in spite of his efforts to detain her.

"Will you meet me to-morrow," she said, "at the old place?"

"Here," he inquired.

"No, no. This is too perilous. At the dear old place."

Was the cup of happiness at this last moment to be dashed forever from his lips? Where, where was the dear old place?

"I'm afraid, I can't—to-morrow," he said, feeling blindly for some clue, some chance revelation.

"The next day, then?" she said in a slightly offended tone.

John's position was pitiable. He was already completely enamored of this charming maiden, and would have gone half round the world to meet her, but how could he when he was ignorant as to the whereabouts of the old place? He did not dare to acknowledge that he did not know.

"Well," he said awkwardly, as she waited for an answer, "I'm afraid the next day—" he paused, noting in horror the trembling of her lips, and the growing anger in her pale face.

"I see," she said in a low, shaking voice, "you have deceived me, you are tired of me. I'll never speak to you again," and bursting into tears, as she finished speaking, she turned and fled from him.

“No, no,” cried John, in an agony of despair, “Blossom! Come back. I will explain”

But she paid no heed; the only answer was the quick beat of her footsteps, already dying in the distance. He tried to follow, but was still too weak from his recent illness, to have any chance of overtaking her, so he gave up the attempt in despair. She was gone. And with grief gnawing at his heart, he crept slowly back to the house.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WORM TURNS.

JOHN'S dreams that night were filled with visions of the lovely girl he had met in the afternoon, and next morning at breakfast his thoughts were still so fixed upon her that he remained deaf to Travers' conversation, or answered his questions at random.

This meal may be taken as one specimen of the many minor vexations, too numerous to mention in detail, which kept John in a perpetual ferment of irritation and resentment. He had always been exceedingly particular about his food, and had liked his eggs carefully boiled, his bacon crisply fried, his toast done to a turn, and his tea hot and strong.

It is hard to imagine, without undergoing his practical experience, what life was like before tea was introduced into England. Instead of the hot, deli-

cately scented mixture to which he was accustomed he was compelled to put up with draughts of small beer, which he detested, and which rendered still more revolting the lumps of badly cooked meat, which were the only food obtainable. And when he had struggled with difficulty through this uninviting repast, it was only to encounter a fresh loss in the shape of his morning pipe.

He had always regarded the after breakfast smoke as the sweetest and most gratifying of the day, and now that it was unprocurable, his soul longed for it more than ever. Every day the lack of it became more unbearable, and did not tend to the cultivation of resignation and good temper. Of all the luxuries and comforts which he had lost through his unfortunate retrogression, this one affected him most, and he never succeeded in becoming reconciled to it.

It was at the moment when this daily craving had attained its highest point, that Travers elected that morning to attack John on a subject peculiarly distasteful to him.

"Do you not think," he said, "that 'twould be seemly in you ere long to visit Mary?"

"Mary?" queried John, his thoughts ungallantly divided between the girl and the pipe.

"Mary Merrill," said Travers.

"Mary Merrill?" repeated John. "Oh yes. The girl Sir Walter was engaged to."

Travers smiled deprecatingly, and assuming, as he always did on such occasions, his blandest manner, said,

"By my faith, dear Walter, you must strive more

manfully with that singular delusion. It matters not much when we are alone, but think of the woeful effect on others. Mary Merrill, pray remember, is the maid to whom you are plighted.

“Bosh ! ” said John.

“I know not rightly the signification of the word, but I take it to convey negation or denial,” said Travers, his manner becoming more gentle and cat-like every moment.

“Certainly.” Replied John. “I utterly repudiate and deny any such engagement.”

“My dear Walter,” said Travers, an ugly light in his eye, belying his silky tones, “I do not think that, as yet, you thoroughly comprehend your position. When you returned from London, a ruined spendthrift, I, as became a good uncle, received you and gave you shelter. Since then, during the sickness induced by your own reckless folly, you have lived here comfortably at free quarters. It cannot, of a surety, be necessary with a man of your parts to call attention to the fact that this cannot continue. If it be possible for you to subsist without money, so much the better for you. It is unfortunately *not* so with me. Money I need, and money I must procure. Your espousal of Mistress Merrill is the only method I perceive of obtaining it.”

“So ! ” said John, in rising anger. “I am to marry her in order to procure funds for you ? ”

“Exactly,” said Travers.

“And that was the reason of your anxiety to provide me with a body ? ”

“Most certainly it was. But for that, you might

have remained a disembodied spirit forever, as far as I was concerned."

"And do you suppose—" cried John furiously—"that I will give my assistance to such a rascally business?"

"My good sir," said Travers, quite unmoved by this outburst. "Be calm, and above all, do not make yourself a laughing stock. There is nothing whatever rascally in the business, as you choose to call it. You are betrothed to the damsel, and she is devoted to you. You cannot, as a man of honor, withdraw. You would but break the poor maid's heart."

This was an argument calculated to strike John in his tenderest part. He was naturally kind-hearted, and shrank from the slightest appearance of cruelty. Travers, seeing the effect he had produced, had no further difficulty in persuading him to pay the required visit, artfully insinuating that, if he afterwards wished to retire from the engagement which Sir Walter had contracted, it might be arranged. John was the more willing to agree to this course of action when he reflected that it was quite within the bounds of possibility that Mary was the girl he had seen the day before.

The Merrill's house stood four miles from the town, and they set out for it on horseback, to John's extreme discomfort, for he was not used to riding. Fortunately Sir Walter seemed to have been a skilled rider, and John found that with his body he had acquired all his purely physical accomplishments.

He had suggested at first, to Travers' bewilderment, that they should go by train, and the ride was

enlivened by his endeavoring to explain to Travers' satisfaction the advantages and details of that convenient invention. He was a man of keen intelligence, and easily grasped the principal points of the system, but he met John's proposal to introduce it into the country with determined opposition.

"My dear Walter," he said, "I doubt not, from the lucidity of your description, that you have really been and travelled by this marvellous fire-eating horse of iron. But let me advise you to confine that knowledge to yourself. Any attempt to publish it abroad, let alone to put it into practice, would inevitably lead to your being burned as a sorcerer, or imprisoned as a madman."

As they traversed the avenue which led to the house, he gave John a final word of advice.

"I trust," he said, "that you will not make a fool of yourself now. If she does not quite satisfy your expectations, though she is a charming girl, make the best of it. Walter proposed to do so, and I cannot see why you should not."

Mr. Merrill received them courteously, though he still regarded John with evident apprehension, and inquired somewhat anxiously after his health.

Travers assured him that he was perfectly restored, and that the temporary aberration of intellect, from which he had been suffering on the occasion of his visit, had quite disappeared.

"That is well, that is well," said the old gentleman, cheerily. "And now I doubt not, young sir, that you are as eager to behold Mary as she is to set eyes on you. So away with you; she awaits you, if

I mistake not, in the library. We old folk will stay here for a gossip."

With a parting joke about young blood, he pushed John into the hall and shut the door behind him.

It was a handsome apartment in which he found himself. The walls were panelled and ornamented with antlers and other trophies of the chase. Across the further end ran a gallery, with a broad staircase leading up to it on either hand. On one side was a large open fire-place, and on the other an oriel window, adorned with coats-of-arms in stained glass.

He had abundant time to observe all this while he was puzzling out an escape from the difficulty in which he was merged. There were six doors leading from the hall, and he did not know which one was that of the library. He finally resolved upon the only course possible in the case—to try them all in turn.

The first two were failures. One was a cupboard and the other opened into a stone-paved room in which a waiting-maid was engaged upon some domestic operation.

"Do you lack anything, Sir Walter?" she asked.

"No," said John, hastily retreating. "No, thanks."

It would obviously never do for him to inquire for the library, which presumably he knew well.

On entering the third door, his eyes fell on a stout, red-haired woman of forty or thereabouts, whose pretensions to personal beauty, if she had ever possessed any, had long since vanished.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said John, politely, preparing once more to beat a retreat, but she rose from

her chair with a slight scream, and rushing at him, flung her arms round his neck, crying:

“Walter—my own darling Walter.”

John’s knees nearly gave way beneath him, as he realized that this was Mary. It was too much.

By great luck the dismay he experienced at the first shock, passed unnoticed by his adorer, who was fully occupied in her own blandishments.

“Come, sit you down,” she said, when she was tired of hugging and kissing him, “and let us have a nice long talk. I have much to tell you.”

He sank into the chair she led him to, and, to his consternation, she sat down on his knees, and once more flung her arms round his neck. He was anxious, if possible, to avoid any violent rupture at present, but this was not to be endured.

“Don’t you think,” he said, awkwardly, “that we could talk more comfortably, if you sat further off?”

It was not, he was forced to acknowledge to himself, a delicate way of putting it, and it was manifest that her surprise was accompanied by a good deal of disgust.

“Oh, very well,” she said, huffishly, as she rose, “as you will. You were used to like it.”

“Walter must have been a man of iron nerve,” was John’s reflection.

“Of course, I do now,” he said aloud. “But, you see, I have been ill and am not yet very strong.”

His attempt to soften matters failed of its effect, and appeared rather to add fuel to the fire.

“Well!” she said, with a sniff of indignation,

"illness hath not improved your manners. I vow I am not so weighty as all that."

"No, no," said he, in terror of an explosion; "but now, even the most fairy form——"

He could not finish the sentence, and endeavored to atone for it by what he intended to be a killing glance, which he felt was a dismal failure. It appeared, however, to have the desired effect of mollifying the wrathful dame, for it was in much tenderer tones that she said:

"Nay, then. Let us sit side by side upon this settle."

He took his seat as far from her as he could, without appearing to wilfully avoid her. But this arrangement was evidently not at all to her liking, for as she poured forth her gush of devotion to her darling Walter, she constantly edged a little nearer to him. As constantly he moved away, when he could do so without attracting attention. Finally, he found himself reduced to the necessity of remaining where he was or subsiding onto the floor, so he rose, under the pretext of being stiff with riding, and strolled to the window. He was not, however, to escape so easily; her attachment to Walter was obviously strong, and her surprise and indignation at his coldness were visibly growing. He struggled bravely to put a good face on his dislike to this woman, but Sir Walter had plainly been very warm in his attentions to her fortune, and John was quite unable to approach to his predecessor's form.

"I am so exceedingly glad to see you well again, dearest," she cried, rapturously.

And John, after a desperate effort to respond in kind, said :

“It’s very kind of you, I’m sure.”

It cannot be denied that it was scarcely lover-like. She could not choose but notice his backwardness, and, unfortunately, in attempting to overcome it by redoubling her caresses, she only increased it. It was clear to him that this could not last much longer. Her temper was giving way rapidly under the constant rebuffs, and he foresaw that her rage would eventually burst all bounds.

“Wherefore so cold to me, dearest?” she said, tragically. “Walter, do you no longer love me?”

His answer in the affirmative met with an embrace, which made him resolve at all hazards to avoid a repetition.

“Suppose we join the others,” he said.

She rose to her feet with a bounce, her eyes flashing with fury.

“What mean you? Would you insult me?” she cried in a shrill voice.

“You see, I am not yet equal to the exertion of a prolonged conversation,” he said in deprecation.

She accepted the excuse for the time, but was unmistakably far from satisfied, and her wrath was still smouldering.

“Walter,” she said, as they reached the door, “you have not yet kissed me as you used to do. Will you not grant me one embrace?”

There was no help for it. Slowly he bent his head and pressed his lips carefully to the back of her neck.

She tore herself away from him and flung out of

the room, slamming the door in his face with a resounding bang.

"I've done it now with a vengeance," thought John, as he proceeded to the other room.

The rest of their visit was not enjoyable to any of the party. The lady was in a towering rage, and did not attempt to conceal the fact. John was ill at ease and awkward. Travers scowled at him on every possible occasion, and Mr. Merrill was seemingly looking forward with no agreeable feelings to a *tete-à-tete* with the infuriated maiden after their departure.

John, encouraged and supported by the presence of the other two, endeavored to the best of his ability to conciliate Mary, by paying her every attention in his power, but his disinclination to their previous interview was neither forgotten nor forgiven, and all his advances were received with open contempt.

It was a relief to them all when their horses were announced.

No sooner had they got out of earshot of the house than John's long-smothered rage broke out.

"What do you mean," he cried, "by asking me to marry an old harridan like that?"

"What do you mean by assuming this fantastic coxcombry," retorted Travers angrily.

"Why, she's old enough to be my mother."

"She will the sooner leave you a widower."

"She'll never have the chance."

"Do you mean that you refuse to fulfil your engagement?"

"It is not my engagement, and I will have nothing to do with it."

Travers, who had been nearer showing his temper than John had ever seen him, rode on for some time in silence, to recover his equanimity. When he spoke again it was in his usual oily tone.

"It were vain to deny that the lady is neither young nor fair, but in occupying, by your own consent, Walter's body, you have incurred also his responsibilities. He had, for reasons of his own, plighted his troth to her, and he always, I must say, carried out his part of the bargain with the most admirable and commendable—fortitude, shall I say? If he could, I cannot for the life of me divine why you cannot also.

"But she's positively hideous!" cried John.

"She is undeniably wealthy," was the dry rejoinder.

"I'm not going to marry that creature to find you money."

"You cannot by any means, avoid doing so. She hath a brother who would kill you on the first hint of such a base desertion."

"I don't care. I won't."

"I may moreover recall to you that the body you now wear, though it can only by a straining of words be called yours, is natheless liable to the pangs of starvation. Rest assured, my dear Walter, it were better to resign yourself. You cannot choose but marry her."

"If I do," said John, "I'll be——."

CHAPTER IX.

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

DURING the week that ensued the relations between John and Travers were undoubtedly strained. The latter had the good sense to leave the matter of the engagement entirely in abeyance, but he had clearly in no way changed his attitude in regard to it, and John was in constant fear of a renewal of the subject. Neither was any further reference made to the lack of money ; but he thought he perceived a tendency to pinching and parsimony which seemed to indicate that it had not existed in Travers' imagination alone, and that his warning was not a vain one.

This reflection filled John with great uneasiness. He was, as he knew too well, entirely dependent upon Travers, and without his constant assistance and advice was worse than helpless. He was still ignorant of many details of Sir Walter's past life, being only aware that it had been, to say the least, a stormy one. He was liable at any moment to encounter persons, with whom his predecessor had had relations, of a more or less shady character, and never went out without the fear of some disagreeable adventure.

It was clear that much of the story was unknown even to Travers, for he discovered by careful inquiries

that he was completely ignorant of the existence of the girl he had met in the lane.

He had not seen her since that day, and was beginning to fear that he had mortally offended her, and that the rupture was permanent. It was with considerable surprise that he realized how seriously this notion affected him. He could not believe that she could have taken so strong a hold upon his heart in so short a space of time; but it was, he felt, undeniable that she had done so. Every afternoon he sought the end of the garden, filled with an eager hope that he should find her there; and every afternoon he came back in bitterer disappointment.

But on March the twenty-fifth, one week after his unfortunate visit to Mary, he found, not indeed the girl herself, but a short note which he concluded must be from her. It was badly written in the small cramped hand of the period, which he still found considerable difficulty in deciphering.

"Dearest Walter," it ran, "I find I can no longer nourish resentment against you. Meet me, to-morrow evening at seven, at the dear old place. Your most loving Rose."

Rose, then, was her name. He retraced his steps with a beating heart. He should see her again. His breast was overflowing with joy, the very birds in the trees seem to call "Rose, Rose, Rose," when suddenly his glowing hopes were crushed ruthlessly to the ground. How could he meet her? Where was "the dear old place?"

All that evening, and all next day, this difficulty haunted and harassed him.

“If,” he reflected—“I fail to keep the appointment, I shall offend her irretrievably, and reconciliation will be impossible. She will, not unnaturally, look upon it as an intentional slight, which she will never forgive. Yet how can I meet her when I do not know the place of rendezvous?”

As the time of the assignation drew near he was almost mad with despair, and his restless irritation finally attained such a pitch that he could not endure to remain within doors. Wrapping himself in a cloak he wandered out.

So absorbed was he in his dark communings, so torn with vexation, that he did not notice where his steps were leading him until he found himself in a narrow winding lane, shut in on either side by lofty hedges, which was quite strange to him. As, however, in his present state of suspense, it was utterly indifferent to him whither he went, he made up his mind to follow it. In about ten minutes he emerged from it into an open clearing, surrounded on all sides by a dense coppice, in the centre of which stood a ruined and deserted cottage.

Vaguely, and with no settled purpose, he strolled across the broken ground before him, and stood in the open doorway. The sun had set, but there was still enough light in the sky to dimly illuminate the interior, and he was aware of a figure standing by the empty hearth.

There was a cry of joy, and in an instant Rose, laughing and crying at the same moment, was clasped in his arms.

It was clear that during his intense preoccupation

Sir Walter's body had moved of its own volition in the well-known direction.

"Oh, you have come, you have come," cried Rose, as he kissed her again and again. "I feared so much that you would not.

She was in a wild flutter of joy and self-reproach.

"How good you are," she said over and over again. "I was so naughty the other day, and I thought perhaps you would never forgive me. You have forgiven me, have you not?"

"Forgiven you?" cried John, gazing down into the appealing eyes turned up to his. "Why, my dearest life, there was nothing to forgive."

"Oh, yes, yes, yes, there was," she answered, with a pretty air of affected rebuke. "I was very cross and wicked; but come and sit down and forgive me again."

John did not need this time to be reminded to share his cloak with her, and as she nestled close to him, while they sat side by side on the stone seat which still stood in the chimney corner, he felt that he was finally and hopelessly in love with this dear, confiding girl. As she chattered gayly the sweet nothings which time out of mind have constituted the greater part of lovers' talk, he was racked internally with fierce remorse. He loved her so truly and sincerely that he could not bear the thought of deceiving her, even with the best intentions. It seemed a cowardly and villainous thing to take such simple love and confidence on false pretences. Although he knew well how far better it was for her that it was he who held her in his arms and not the

real Sir Walter, he could not overcome the feeling of being a traitor and a scoundrel.

“Rose, darling,” he said, finally; “Blossom, I have something I want to tell you, a confession to make to you.”

“Oh, Walter, what?” she cried, and there was so real a light of terror in her startled face that he had not the heart to proceed.

“After all,” he thought, “what is the use? It would only render her unhappy. I should never be able to make her understand. She would think me mad.”

“Don’t look so frightened, dearest,” he said, aloud, “It is nothing much. I have been very ill you know, and if at times I seem forgetful or uncertain of things that have passed you must be patient and forbearing. My memory is not what it was. I have forgotten many things.”

That was not what he intended to confess at first; but it was done now and past recall. To her he was forever Sir Walter and no other.

“Poor dear, poor dear,” she murmured, adding with a charming air of triumph, “but you have not forgotten me!”

Ah! what a twinge wrung poor John’s conscience as he kissed her and answered “No.”

“Walter,” she said, after a space filled with soft phrases too delicate to be petrified here into written words, “Walter, I am in distress, dear; in such sore distress.”

“Distress?” he cried, taking the simplest way that presented itself of removing the tears that rolled down

her smooth round cheeks. "Who could bear to trouble such a sweet innocent as you, my Blossom?"

"My brother," she answered, with a sob. "You remember him, do you not?"

"Yes," said John, with an effort, "I remember him."

"I think he suspects something," she went on, "and he insists that I shall marry old Farmer Redfern without any further delay."

"But, Rose," cried John, starting to his feet, "you must not. I cannot, will not, have it. You shall marry no one but me."

"Oh, Walter," she cried joyfully, rising and clinging to him, "will you, will you really? Oh, save me, Walter, save me from him! I hate him and I love you so much!"

"I will," cried John, passionately. "I will marry you at once. I swear it."

"But can you, Walter?" she objected. "You said that there were difficulties; that if you married me it must be kept strictly private; that your uncle must never, never know."

John's heart swelled with rage at the thought of having even to wear the outward form of such a base wretch as Sir Walter had too clearly been.

"I do not know. I cannot tell. I forget." He said, despairingly. "But you shall never marry any one but me. Rose," he went on, appealingly, "if—if the worse came to the worst would you trust yourself to me? Would you fly with me? I swear before heaven I would marry you at once. May a curse rest upon the man who, even in his dreams, could

think of injuring such innocence as yours. Rose, dearest, my Blossom, if I find that I cannot marry you here; that my uncle is immovable; that the obstacles, whatever they may be—I cannot tell now, I forget—are unsurpassable, will you confide yourself to my honor and come with me?”

She had drawn a little away from him, startled perhaps by his vehemence, with one hand, however, still resting on his breast, while his arm still encircled her; but now, after gazing for a moment into his earnest eyes, she flung her arms once more around his neck, crying:

“Trust you, Walter? Always, always and forever.”

And as John kissed her on the lips he felt that he had in full measure atoned for the deceit he was compelled to put upon her.

It was dark by this time, and as Rose declared she must be going, John volunteered to see her safely home, an offer which was gladly accepted.

She lived in a small house about a mile from the town, and when he had left her, with a last lingering kiss at the gate, he turned homewards with a heart beating high with joy. He did not know what difficulties lay before him, he knew only that Travers would surely resolutely oppose the marriage; but he determined that, be the consequences what they might, he, and no other, should marry Rose.

He had not gone far before he met a man slouching along the road and addressed him:

“Can you tell me, my man, who lives in that house yonder?”

The rustic apparently recognized him by the voice, for he burst into jeering laughter.

“Ah!” he cried, “who indeed? I marvel. Dost take me for a fool? Who lives there? Who should know, an thou dost not, Sir Walter Carlingford?”

There was a tone of menace and contempt in his voice, and John left him without a word; but as he proceeded on his way he could still hear the lout behind him chuckling and sneering to himself.

His next attempt to discover might have proved disastrous, for his question was met by the surly reply:

“What is that to thee? I do.”

John’s heart stood still. This was the brother; but it was too late to retreat, and the man did not seemingly know Sir Walter.

“It’s a nice place,” he said, airily.

“Marry, no thanks to thee,” was the encouraging rejoinder.

“And what might your name be?” he asked, scarcely expecting an answer.

“My name is Garland,” said the other. “I’m not ashamed to own it. I’ll back it against thee or any man. Hast anything against it? Eh, hast thou?” he repeated, coming closer. He had evidently been drinking, and John was anxious to escape. But the other was not so easily shaken off.

“What wouldst thou with me, then?” he shouted. “Wherefore comest thou slinking and spying in the dark, asking honest men their names? Who art thou, an that be all, who art thou?”

The fellow was evidently working himself into a

fury, and was in just the humor to quarrel with any one, so John was beginning to fear that their interview would end in a personal encounter, when from the house behind them a voice, which he knew to be Rose's was heard calling:

"William, William! What are you doing there? Come in."

The man turned without another word and went in, leaving John free to proceed without further molestation.

"Garland," he said to himself; "Rose Garland. It is a pretty name."

He would not before have believed that he could have felt so happy in his unpleasant situation, but that evening he was in a state of perfect, unalloyed happiness, the last he was to know for many a long day.

CHAPTER X.

A DREADFUL ENCOUNTER.

TROUBLES now began to gather thickly round John. In the first place, Travers insisted upon his repeating the visit to Mary. He pretended to have abandoned all idea of the marriage, but he maintained, and John was unable to oppose him, that the breach ought, out of ordinary respect to the lady, to be brought about gradually, and that he should decrease by degrees the frequency of his visits instead of suddenly withdrawing altogether.

Although John did not for a moment believe that Travers had so quickly and completely relinquished his design, yet this argument was so reasonable, and appealed so strongly to his innate proneness to deference to women that he yielded to it and visited Mary occasionally, stipulating however that Travers should always accompany him, and that his *tete-a-tete* interviews with her should be cut as short as possible.

His distress on these occasions was greatly increased by the discovery that, in spite of her somewhat ungainly appearance, Mary was in reality a woman of good heart and kindly disposition, who was extremely devoted to Sir Walter, and was evidently deeply hurt by his apparent neglect.

It grieved him unspeakably to observe the pain she endured at his disinclination to her advances, and had it been possible he would have endeavored to overcome it, and to sacrifice himself for what he saw clearly would be her happiness.

Had it not been for Rose, he might perhaps have eventually reconciled himself to this course, but under the circumstances it was out of the question. His love for Rose increased with each of their meetings, which were now tolerably frequent. But even there his happiness was considerably disturbed by the thought of Mary, and by Rose's growing uneasiness springing from the pressure put upon her by her brother.

At one time, he thought of throwing himself on Mary's generosity, telling her the story of his attachment to Rose, and appealing to her kindness to release him from the engagement. But he was not suffi-

ciently sure of her, and the fear that she might betray the state of the case to Travers, which would inevitably ruin all, prevented him carrying out his purpose.

Travers, in the meantime, seemed to be perfectly unsuspecting and content with the progress of affairs, though John soon had reason to believe that he watched him more closely than he appeared to do.

This condition of painful doubt and hesitation continued for six weeks, and might have been prolonged indefinitely, had not an event befallen, which precipitated matters.

On the tenth of May, having, as usual, conducted Rose safely to her gate after their meeting, he was strolling leisurely along the road in the direction of the town.

It was a warm night, but the clouds had gathered, threatening rain, and it was very dark.

Shortly after parting from Rose, he became aware of a footstep in the darkness, not far behind him. It followed so persistently, keeping time with his own, and neither gaining upon him nor dropping behind, that loosening his sword in its sheath, he stopped and turned. The footstep behind him ceased at the same instant and dead silence ensued. He stood for some minutes listening intently, but vainly, and then resumed his walk at a quicker pace. The step behind him increased in rapidity to the same extent. Once more he stopped, and once more utter silence reigned around. He started to run, and on the road behind him he heard the beat of running feet.

He reached before long a place where the trees arched over, joining above. The spot was gloomy in

the broad glare of noon, at night it was dark as pitch. As he entered it, from the hedgeside, a hundred yards or so in advance, came a low whistle which was answered from behind him. He stopped on the instant, and again all was fearfully still.

This was getting unbearable. It was plain that he was caught in a trap of some sort, and after a moment's hesitation, he concluded that it would be better to turn back and face his mysterious pursuer before he was completely surrounded. He accordingly retraced his steps, having previously drawn his sword.

He had not gone far before he saw, against the slightly brighter surface of the dusty road, a darker mass, which he rightly conjectured to be a man.

"Who's there?" he cried. "Speak, or I strike."

"Softly, softly, Sir Walter," said a gruff voice. "Speak not so loudly."

"Who are you?" said John, in wonder.

His first impulse was to deny the identity, but it was so evident that the man had followed him knowingly, that he judged it to be useless.

"What, know you not your old friend?" was the reply. "'Tis true 'tis dark as hell's mouth here, but you should know a comrade's voice—Bill Wringley."

Who, John wondered, was this coarse ruffian, who called himself a friend. His name was unknown, and judging by his tone and manner he could hardly have been Sir Walter's associate for any good.

"What do you want with me?" he said.

"Ah, that is better, let us talk this business out

friendly and familiar like. But first I will summon Dick."

With which words he gave a similar whistle to the one that had first alarmed John.

"Who is Dick?" said he.

"Who is Dick," repeated the other. "Lord, lord! to think a man should so forget his best friends, as aided him in his trouble. Here is Dick. I dare swear he will remember you."

"Sarvice, Sir Walter," said the man who now approached, in a rather more respectful tone.

"Sir Walter hath forgotten us," said the man called Bill. "Pitiful, aint it, the ingratitude of this world? Howsomever, I should not be surprised if we recalled ourselves to his recollection. What say you?"

He concluded with a chuckle, in which Dick joined him.

"What do you want with me?" said John again. They had got him between them, with his back to the hedge, so that flight was impossible.

"Money," they answered in a breath.

"Then you couldn't have come to a worse place. I have none."

"You must obtain some," said Dick bluntly.

"What do you mean?" cried John indignantly.

"Come, my master," said Dick roughly. "Don't keep us parleying here all night. Pay up."

"Softly, softly, mate," interposed Bill. "Let us talk this matter out quietly, as gentlemen to gentlemen. Look you here, Sir Walter, my mate Dick and

myself are out at heels, without a groat, and in our distress who should we apply to, but to you?"

"Why to me?" said John, a chill horror growing up within him. What was Sir Walter's connection with these scoundrels?

"Oh, stow that," ejaculated Dick, who seemed to be of an irascible temperament.

But Bill resumed in the same cringing tone.

"It's only human nature when you need a helping hand to turn to them as you has helped yourself."

"Helped!" exclaimed John, in what they clearly regarded as affected surprise. "Helped! In what?"

Dick gave a snort of disgust, but Bill was quite unmoved.

"'Tis small pleasure raking up old matters," he said. "You know, and I know, and Dick here, he knows. And there is some things as is better guessed at than spoken out, even among friends."

"I swear, I've no notion to what your refer," cried John, in despair.

"Say you so?" said Bill. "You bear a most accommodating memory about with you, I must say, young master. Naming names can do no ill. What if I says to you—Cricnell Common?"

He paused, as if expecting to produce a great effect, in which he was, not unnaturally, disappointed.

"Will not that serve? Your conscience asks a deal of jogging. I would I had but half of it. Let us try another," he continued, lowering his voice to a hoarse whisper—"Roger Helmsley."

The name was faintly familiar to John, but he could not for the life of him remember in what connection, so he remained silent. This unforeseen attitude of Sir Walter's was not without its effect upon the men. Dick broke out into open curses, and even the bland Bill's temper was obviously giving way under the strain, for there was a shade of menace in his voice as he went on:

"Cricnell Common—Roger Helmsley: them's the words, mate, and the tottle is gold, for me and Dick here."

John's irritation under this mysterious hinting culminated at last.

"You get no money from me, I can tell you. As for Cricnell Common and Roger Helmsley, what are they to me, but mere empty names?"

Bill gave a low whistle of surprise, and Dick indulged in a flowery monologue not suited to the exigencies of polite society.

"Look here!" said Bill fiercely, "enough palaver. 'Tis money or swing, I tell you plainly. Swing or money, that's the motto."

"Swing!" cried John in horror.

"Ah, that's it," said Dick, accompanying his words with an extremely disagreeable piece of pantomime. "Swing. And if we swing, so do you. You may lay to that, my lad."

John's brain was in a whirl. What was this secret between them? It was manifestly more than discreditable, it was criminal. For his own safety in the future it was essential to know the worst.

"You must excuse me," he said wildly. "I have

been ill. My memory in many things is gone. What do you mean?"

"A plague on't," said Bill. "Do you mean to stand there telling me that you have forgotten inducing me and Dick here, for a handsome remuneration, I grant you that, a handsome remuneration, to put a knife into Roger Helmsley, as was too familiar with a certain fair lady, the same being Mistress Merrill, which was done quiet and satisfactory, according to orders, on Cricnell Common."

"God help me!" cried John. "Yes, yes, I had forgotten."

"'Tis no avail to try denying of it," remarked Dick, "because we have it in your own hand of write."

John was utterly overwhelmed, stunned by the fear and horror of this revelation. It was useless to attempt denial. There could be no doubt that Sir Walter had done this thing.

"So," continued Bill, "seeing as that handsome remuneration is spent, we naturally comes to you, quiet and gentlemanlike, and says, 'Money' says we. 'Got none,' says you. 'Get some,' says we. 'Money or swing.' Them's the words; eh, mate?"

"Money or swing," responded Dick.

"Get it, but how?"

"Another trifling forgery might serve," suggested Bill.

"Or a moonlight excursion in this beautiful country," said Dick.

Forgery, highway robbery! What was this net of villainy in which he found himself entangled?

"It's impossible," he groaned in an agony of apprehension.

"Dick!" exclaimed Bill suddenly, "I have a notion. Sir Walter knows Master Merrill's house like A B C in the hornbook. Suppose we break in there. There's money and plate enough there to make men of us for life."

"Good," said Dick approvingly. "Good, mate."

"All right, break away," said John determining to forewarn the proposed victims. But Bill was much too sharp to be caught in such an obvious snare.

"Ah, verily," he said, "but you come in company."

"I!" said John. "Why?"

"Think you that we are going to face the hazard of your forewarning them, and getting us laid by the heels. No, no, you come too, and we shall be secure. In any case, money it is, in some fashion."

"I'll think of it," said John. "How long will you give me?"

"One week. I think we can manage that much; eh, Dick?"

Dick assented, and they turned to go, Bill pausing to give the poor wretch a final word of warning.

"In one week's time we will await you at the old ken. Either you bring money, or you consent to the enterprise—or the next morning an information is laid afore the justices, and you know what the consequences will be then."

Dick repeated his unpleasant piece of pantomime, and they vanished into the darkness.

As their retreating footsteps died away in the

distance, John sank with a shudder upon the bank behind him. Heedless of the rain which pouring down, dripped from the trees upon him, heedless of the howling wind and muttering thunder, he sat, he knew not how long, his soul shrivelled with the sick agony of consternation and disgust. Never until then had he realized thoroughly the full terror of what he had brought upon himself.

What a scoundrel, what a fool Sir Walter must have been to have put himself so utterly in the power of two such unscrupulous rogues! And he, who was innocent, would have to bear the punishment. What could he do? How could he save himself?

The threats of the two villains were no idle ones. He knew that if they were disappointed of the expected blackmail, they would not hesitate to denounce Sir Walter to the authorities, and he, John, would suffer in his place.

If he did not procure the money he would indubitably be hanged, yet he could only do so by staining himself with crime. He vowed that he would sooner pay the penalty of Sir Walter's wickedness than do that.

Slowly and wearily he crept home, weakened and shattered by the blow his peace had received.

Travers, on his entrance, was seated as he had first seen him on that fatal night, and the sight revived all his terror and remorse.

"My dear Walter!" he said looking up, "what a sad plight you are in. Where have you been, and what ails you?"

"Release me," cried John, advancing fiercely.

“You must, you shall. I insist you release me, now, at once.”

Travers smiled malevolently, but did not stir.

“Why?” he said, “what hath befallen you?”

Briefly, feverishly, John told him the whole story, his interview with the men, and the discovery they had made to him.

“Ah!” said Travers at the end, without betraying any emotion. “So it was your achievement, my dear Walter. I have always suspected that it was your handiwork; but out of respect to a relative, you understand, I concealed my suspicions. It was folly in you, however, to put it into writing. Take my advice, my dear Walter, the advice of an old, experienced man—never put pen to paper if you can avoid it.”

“What am I to do?” cried John, revolted at this exhibition of callous iniquity.

“Do?” said Travers, “marry, procure the money.”

“Yes; but how?”

“I have it not to give you. I would not, an I had. You must e’en go with them.”

“I cannot, I will not,” said John.

“Oh, very well, very well. Settle it your own way. If you choose to be hanged——”

“You must release me,” said John again. “You can, you shall.”

“Enough of this,” said Travers, rising. “Once for all, I will not.”

John tried to shake his resolution by prayers, entreaties, threats; but all in vain.

“What use have you for me now?” he pleaded.

“You have yourself consented to my breaking the engagement with Mary.

“Fool!” thundered Travers. “Think you I am so easily thwarted? I have undone all the mischief your blundering fastidiousness has wrought. Your betrothal stands as firm as ever. Go! Rob or hang, I care not which, but I will never release you.”

John rushed from the room and, soaked to the skin as he was, flung himself upon his bed in a frenzy of mingled rage and fear. When the first paroxysms of his grief were over, he began to regard the situation more calmly. A ray of hope awoke in his mind.

Might he not, of his own accord, retrace the path that had led to this awful dilemma? Was Travers’ consent or assistance really essential? He would, at all events, attempt it.

But it was useless. He could not abstract his mind. He had no hold in his old life such as Travers had afforded him. His mind wandered aimlessly.

Thoughts of the two ruffians surged through his brain, and Rose’s face came like a vision of heaven to distract him.

Wearied out, at last, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XI.

TWO WOMEN.

ONE week. One short week.

To those who look forward to same eagerly wished-for pleasure it may seem to drag its leaden length along wearily enough; but to John, whose only anticipations were of unimaginable horrors, it flew appallingly fast.

It had already more than half passed before he could find courage to venture from the shelter of the house, and even then it was only after dark that he dared to steal fearfully and doubtfully to the deserted cottage where he was accustomed to meet Rose.

He had come to a final desperate resolve. His only chance of safety lay in flight, and his object was to persuade Rose to accompany him. He could not leave her behind to be forced into an unhappy marriage with the wealthy old hunk her brother designed her for. Life without her presented to him too drear and desolate a prospect.

Fortunately, some instinct had prompted her also to seek the meeting-place that evening. After the first interchange of caresses and solitudes, he laid the matter briefly and forcibly before her.

He bitterly deplored to himself the fact that he

was unable to reveal to her the true cause of his flight, but he was so firmly established in her belief as the real Sir Walter that to do so would only heap ignominy upon himself.

An imaginary irreconcilable quarrel with his uncle was the reason he alleged to her for the necessity of instant and secret departure.

“Rose, my dearest,” he concluded, “without you life to me is valueless, neither can I leave you to fall a victim to your brother’s avarice. I cannot, as you know, wed you here before I go ; but I swear to you that I will do so at the earliest opportunity ; and until then no sister could be treated with greater respect than you shall receive from me. It is useless to heap asseveration upon asseveration. If you do not believe me, they would be unavailing ; if you do, unnecessary. Rose, dearest heart, think well before you give an answer, which must determine the happiness of both our lives. Will you trust me ?”

There was no hesitation in her voice, no doubt in her face, as she flung herself into his arms, crying :

“I will trust you, Walter.”

Their plan was quickly arranged. They were to meet at nine o’clock on the next night but one on the same spot, thence to turn their backs forever on the old life and to enter into a future of unalloyed bliss.

“Walter, dear,” said Rose, as they passed gently through the lane on their way home in the moonlight, “you will be true to me, will you not ?”

The question was asked in desire for the repetition

of a pleasing certainty, not in any doubt, and he answered her only with a kiss.

As they moved slowly onwards John, gazing down into the sweet face that was, he thought, soon to be wholly his, felt her stop, and saw an expression of fear growing in her eyes. He glanced hastily up and saw, standing before them, so as to bar their way, the figure of a woman.

The light from the moon fell full upon her and he recognized her at once. It was Mary.

“Who is that woman?” Rose whispered breathlessly, and then all was silent between them.

He struggled vainly to collect his ideas. What could he do or say? To one of these women, if not to both, he must appear despicable beneath contempt; but, although he was innocent, he could find no word to say in his defence. The only explanation he could offer would be to them so wild and incredible that it was better to attempt none.

“This, then,” said Mary, breaking silence at length, in a deep, pained voice, “this, then, is the cause of the coldness I have noticed between us?”

John bowed his head, but found no voice to answer. Rose clung to him in terror, but said nothing.

“Wherefore did you not tell me?” Mary continued, after a pause. “Think you I am so contemptible a thing as to force you into a marriage against your inclinations. You sought me; I did not seek you. Against the promptings of my own reason you persuaded me to believe you; you convinced me that you loved me; you taught me too easily to love you in return; and this is my reward.

Oh, Walter, Walter ! why have you done this thing? I do not blame you for giving your love to one younger and fairer than I, but why did you come to trouble my peace ? Why ? ” she added, with a bitter laugh. “ It is needless to ask when I know. It was for my wealth.”

“ No, no,” cried John, in broken accents, overcome by the dignity of her grief.

“ Hush ! ” she said. “ Do not gainsay me. Do not add to your baseness by denying it. Let me look upon the beauty that has strength to so degrade you.”

She put out her hand and drawing Rose shrinking and trembling towards her, turned her downcast face to the light.

“ Yes,” she said, “ poor child, you are fair. I should, perhaps, pity your lot more than mine. Our fates would have been much alike. Yours the deceived mistress, mine the deserted wife.”

“ Mary ! ” cried John stung by this undeserved accusation, “ by Heaven ! you wrong me.”

He stopped, and as she waited for him to continue, the silence was broken only by the sobs of the af-frighted and bewildered Rose.

What could he say in refutation ? How could he answer her ? To tell the truth was impossible. Yet if he did not, how could he defend himself ? He knew that her conjecture was in part correct, that Sir Walter had intended this double villainy. How then could he clear himself ? His state of mind was pit-eous, filled as he was with all the shame due to the

real Sir Walter, and all the indignation at the imputation endured by his unhappy self.

"I am, at least, glad," said Mary, as he remained speechless, "that you have enough sense of honor left not to add falsehood to your disgrace. Tell me, child," she went on, turning to Rose, "has he taught you to love him also?"

"I do love him," murmured Rose, holding out her hand in womanly sympathy to John. He seized it and seemed to gather strength.

"And he loves you?"

"He has told me so," whispered Rose shyly.

"He has told you so," repeated Mary, bitterly.

"Mary, Miss Merrill!" interrupted John, "listen to me I beg. If I could tell you, if I could make you believe the whole truth, I could clear myself, I swear; but you would not, you could not believe me. Let me at least explain. I never, so help me Heaven in my direst need, I never for an instant contemplated the treachery you charge me with. I have been a coward; I am not and never have been the scoundrel you think me. That I should before have told you the state of the case I freely and willingly confess, but indeed I did not dare. I must suffer your contempt in silence, for I cannot tell you why. But I never in one single thought meant harm to this innocent girl."

"I alone was to suffer," said Mary, "your professions to me were lies."

"I never said I loved you," cried John impetuously, "in all our intercourse I never gave you cause to believe so. I mean—God! what can I say?"

“Say nothing, if you cannot speak the truth, but act, and for the future act with honesty. It is not for me to reproach you; of what you done to me I have no more to say. If you would make reparation, marry that poor girl at your side, and I—I will strive to forget you.”

The indignation that had held her up so long, broke down at last, and she burst into tears. John suffering unspeakable tortures, stood in helpless silence. Rose in the true kindness of her loving little heart, flew to her endeavoring to comfort and console her.

“No, no,” she cried, the sympathetic tears pouring down her cheeks, “you shall not sacrifice yourself for me. I will give him up. I cannot bear to see you so unhappy. I love him, ’tis true, but I can but die.”

John still stood silent—helpless—while the two women wept, and strove as warmly each to sacrifice herself, as if it were to render herself happy, he had no word to say. In his heart he cursed Sir Walter, but he could not exculpate himself. It enraged him to think that he, whose tenderness for women was almost quixotic, could be supposed to have aimed so cowardly a blow at two such loving hearts. For Mary, he knew now as he had never known before, carried beneath her grotesque exterior a true, strong woman’s heart.

“No, no,” she cried at length, when the first passionate outburst of her grief had subsided.

She approached John, leading Rose by the hand.

“Walter,” she said, “speak truth now as you have faith in Heaven. Do you truly love this maid?”

"By all my hopes of salvation," he said, firmly, "I do."

"And you never loved me?" she asked with a rising sob.

His only answer was a groan.

"Then take her," she said, pressing her gently to him, "and as you are a Christian man, see to it that no ill or suffering ever come to her from you."

She turned to go, but John, in an agony of remorse for a wrong which was not his doing, fell on his knees crying.

"Mary, will you not say that you forgive me?"

She paused for a moment, tears running down her cheeks, wringing her hands together in her misery.

"No, no," she wailed, "not yet. I cannot yet."

And turning she sped away into the night.

John buried his face in his hands with a groan. Presently he felt a gentle hand softly stroking his hair. He looked up, and beheld Rose gazing tearfully down upon him.

"Walter," she said, "will you not speak to me?"

"Rose," he cried, leaping to his feet, "can you really forgive me? Do you still love me?"

"How can I choose but love you?" she answered, as she sank into his arms, where she lay in a tender grateful embrace.

"Do you know Walter," she said, as they resumed their interrupted way homewards, "since your illness I find you strangely altered?"

"For the better?" asked he, anxiously.

"For the better always. You are the same, yet somehow very different. There was a fierce, hungry

light in your eyes that seemed to scorch me. Sometimes of old you used to frighten me. But now when I look into them, seeking yet fearing it, I find nothing but true love, perfect truth and trust."

"So may you always," he said solemnly, drawing her to him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DARK HOUSE.

THAT Travers' seeming want of suspicion had been merely a mask to conceal the closest watchfulness was soon conclusively proved to John's dissatisfaction. He had always appeared equally ignorant of, and indifferent to John's outgoings and incomings, but that he had all the while been thoroughly cognizant of them was now to be shown.

On the night on which he had arranged to meet Rose for the last time at the deserted cottage, the night which was to see them joining their fortunes, and wandering out homeless into the world, with only their mutual love to support them—on that night, Travers, on one pretext or another, refused to let John out of his sight, even for a moment. It was done so simply, so airily, that he was for a long time doubtful whether it was a deep design or merely an unfortunate coincidence. After a time, however, the effort seemed so persistent, the intention so obvious,

that he was convinced that Travers had really an object in his obtrusive companionship, and that he had in some mysterious way become acquainted with his appointment with Rose.

How he could have done so passed John's comprehension, for even if, as he would not for an instant suspect, Mary had revealed to him the intrigue which she had detected, she could not have informed him of the vital importance of that particular meeting, because she herself was ignorant of it.

That he did know could not be doubted, for it was not until after midnight, when all chance of Rose's still lingering at the trysting place had gone, that he relaxed his vigilance, and under the pretext of weariness, left John to himself. Hoping against hope, he at once set out for the cottage, and drew little consolation on his road from the fancy that, as he softly closed the house-door, he heard in the darkened passage behind him a low sneering chuckle.

He found, as he feared, that Rose had long since departed, and had, in all probability, crept home broken-hearted at what she could not but believe to be his perfidy or forgetfulness.

It was in no agreeable frame of mind that he sought his room. He was lashed to madness by the thought of Rose waiting hour after hour, with a still sinking heart, for him who never came, her disappointment turning to despair, and her despair tinged more and more with doubt and distrust; and if Travers actually possessed the intimate knowledge of John's thoughts and actions which he appeared to have, he must have trembled not a little at the narrow

escape he enjoyed that night from personal violence in reward of his craft and cunning.

Poor John's mental disturbance was in no wise lightened by the reflection that the failure of his scheme entailed upon him the disagreeable necessity of an interview the next night with the two ruffians whom he was particularly anxious to avoid.

The next day, throwing aside all caution, he endeavored eagerly to get speech with Rose. If he could but arrange with her to fly that evening, and could avoid encountering Travers in the meantime he believed that escape was still possible. He had not unfrequently met her in his daily wanderings in the town, when they had invariably passed one another as strangers with nothing but a shy glance of loving recognition. On that day, he was resolved, if he could discover her, to cast all subterfuge to the winds, and speak to her, if but for a moment. But though he sought her in all the most likely spots, he could nowhere get a glimpse of the little rose-colored hood he knew and loved so well. Unless he braved the risk of going boldly to her cottage he was doomed to failure, and after mature deliberation he rejected that expedient as altogether too dangerous.

Night came, and he was finally committed to one of two courses, either to keep his appointment with the men, or to fly alone, leaving Rose to her fate. The latter project was scarcely half-formed in his mind before it was dismissed, and he was reluctantly compelled to reconcile himself to the former.

Although he was in ignorance of the appointed spot, he suffered no uneasiness on that score, as he

felt sure from his previous experience, that Sir Walter's body, if left to its own guidance, would find the path his feet *must* undoubtedly have trodden often.

Accordingly, when the time approached, he set out, laboriously avoiding all thoughts of the direction in which he was going, and permitting his feet to stray whither they would. It was more difficult to achieve this purpose consciously, than unconsciously as he had done before, but by strictly confining his meditations to Rose, he succeeded.

He was still wandering, hand in hand with her, by a cool stream in a gentle summer land, when he found himself standing in front of a low-frowning door, at which, without reflection, he had already knocked in a peculiar measure which he could not afterwards recall.

The house stood in the worst part of the town, inhabited mostly by the rough population, who found occupation on the river which ran close beside it. It was a gloomy, tumble-down building, and as far as he could see, was utterly deserted. The windows that faced the road were devoid of glass, and the rooms within were empty and damp-smelling. The place was apparently little better than a ruin.

So desolate was it that he was about to withdraw, under the notion that he had failed in his quest, when he heard a shuffling footstep in the stone-paved passage behind the sullen door, and the shrill creak of a wicket panel withdrawn.

"Who is there?" said a low, hoarse voice from within.

"It is I," said John.

"One eye or two?" was the rejoinder, and John, without thinking why, replied :

"One eye."

"Enter one eye, and don't wink," said the voice; and the clank of a chain, and the harsh screech of rusty bolts drawn back told him that he had in some fashion unknown to himself, satisfied the doubts of the mysterious doorkeeper, and that the entrance was clear to him.

He passed down a passage, while his unseen interlocutor with a practised hand, swiftly once more bolted and chained the door behind him.

When he had apparently traversed the whole depth of the house, he found himself in a small court-yard, enclosed on all sides by lofty buildings, in the further corner of which a lighted window shone dimly. He began to cross the intervening space, but had not gone far before he struck his shins smartly against something hard, and only saved himself by clutching a chain which his grasp providentially encountered, from falling headlong into a well which yawned beneath him, the stars above reflected in the still surface at an immeasurable depth below.

At the noise of his stumble the door of the room was thrown wide, and as he recovered his feet he saw, standing in the lighted space, a singularly small and withered old hag, holding a rushlight above her head, and peering out into the darkness.

"Sir Walter!" she exclaimed, as John approached, in a voice which made him start. It was a deep, strong bass, so extraordinarily out of proportion to the

wizened frame that produced it that surprise struck him like a shock.

"Hast forgotten the well?" she said, in evident astonishment.

"Yes," said John, hesitatingly, "I forgot the well."

"That is strange," she answered, her deep tone so full of ominous meaning, of mysterious import that he carefully refrained from any other inquiry. He was not anxious to learn what good or bad reason Sir Walter had for remembering it.

"You are waited for," she went on, and pressing on a panel which was undistinguishable from the rest of the wall, revealed a winding staircase, and stood aside as if to let him pass. It was an evil-looking, evil-smelling place, but he had no option but to proceed. The panel was closed behind him the instant he had entered, and he was plunged in darkness as black "as the throat of a wolf," as the saying goes; the place itself being by no means unsuggestive of that unamiable portal.

He had stumbled upwards for a space that seemed interminable, when suddenly he heard a grinding noise overhead, and a flood of light poured upon him from above. Lightly springing up the remaining steps, he emerged in a circular room. A narrow table ran round it, and against the wall behind it a stone bench, on which twelve or fourteen men sat silently staring at him.

By a singular freak of the builders, the trap-door through which he had entered, and which had been closed behind him by some invisible agency, was lo-

cated in the very centre of the apartment, so that he stood for some time surrounded on all sides by speechless, motionless men. Turn in which direction he would, his gaze encountered a pale, emotionless face and blank watchful eyes. No man stirred or spoke. They were evidently waiting for some sign or password from him ; but what he knew not, for now that his mind was in a state of active consciousness he was dependent entirely upon himself.

The silence was becoming embarrassing and John, who could only hope to recognize his two undesirable acquaintances by their voices, was vaguely wondering what he should do next, when one of them at length spoke, in a tone which he recognized as Bill Wringley's.

"You must pardon Sir Walter, my masters," he said, "if he should be somewhat backward in the fulfilment of the wonted forms and ceremonies. He has been ill and his memory is disordered. In good sooth, he had e'en forgotten me and Dick here—had he not, mate?"

"So he said," replied a man on his right, whom John perceived to be his other persecutor.

They all rose—there were fourteen of them in all—and each man raised his glass.

"C," said Bill, solemnly.

"R," continued Dick, in the same tones.

"I," added the man next to him, and so they went on, each in his turn mentioning a letter, until the man on Bill's left concluded with "N," and John, who had wonderingly followed this singular performance, made out the two words: "Cricnell Common."

“Great heavens!” he exclaimed to himself. “Are all these scoundrels participators in Sir Walter’s secret?”

“You perceive,” said Bill, after a pause which he himself was clearly expected to fill up, “he *has* forgotten.”

“Yes,” said the other thirteen in one breath, “*he* has forgotten, but *we* remember.”

Whereupon each man emptied his mug, and sitting down, commenced conversing with his neighbor as if an important duty had been satisfactorily accomplished.

John, as was obviously expected of him, took a seat between Bill and Dick, and by way of making the best of the situation, suggested that the company should drink with him, a proposal which was greeted with acclamations.

The liquor produced was the coarsest fiery spirit, which nearly choked him when he tried to swallow it, though the rest seemed to relish it exceedingly.

“Have you brought the money?” said Bill, presently, in a low voice.

“No,” replied John, in the same tone.

“That’s bad,” said Dick.

“Are you resolved, then?” asked Bill.

“Resolved?”

“Ready for that affair we conferred upon?”

John had determined, on considering the matter beforehand, to agree cheerfully to any proposal they might make, only endeavoring to gain as much time as possible by deferring it as long as he could.

“How soon?” he said.

"Let me consider," said Bill. "It is no use doing things in haste. Hurry leads to the gallows, as the saying goes. This 'ere is a weighty venture and needs discreet handling. I do not think as it can be arranged under a week."

"Ten days were better," said Dick, and John could have hugged him, so strongly did hope spring up within him at the lengthened respite.

"So be it," said Bill. "This is the seventeenth. The twenty-seventh then. Be here at nine without fail."

"Do all these—gentlemen," John went on, after a pause, in which he substituted that misused word for "scoundrels," an appellation which was so well-deserved that it rose unconsciously to his lips. "Do all these gentlemen go with us?"

"No, no," said Bill hastily. "Not a word to them. This is a little private job between me and you, and Dick here."

"All right," said John. "The twenty-seventh."

"No tricks upon travellers, mark you," said Dick, with a scowl. "No shirking or blabbing."

"Why, how you talk, man," said John, with much apparent candor. "How can I help myself? You and our—friends here know too much for that. Don't be afraid, I shall be here."

He resolved inwardly, however, that by that time he would take care to be far enough away.

"And now," he said to Bill, "that that little matter is comfortably disposed of, if it is not disagreeable to you and these other—gentlemen"—the word

would stick in his throat—"I should much like to go."

"Go!" exclaimed Bill in astonishment. "Already! Rest where you are and let us have a goodly carouse. Sir Walter," he went on, raising his voice, "is anxious to depart, without a song or anything. Surely that may not be."

This announcement was met by a clamor of remonstrance from the rest, to whom Sir Walter had undoubtedly been a cherished and sympathetic boon companion.

"Gentlemen," said John, rising when the uproar had died away, "I regret extremely, no one more so, the necessity that compels me to leave you so early. You will, I think, do me justice by owning that I do not, as a rule, shirk my liquor."

The unanimous approval and assent that this remark evoked proved, to John that this shot had hit the mark.

"But, gentlemen," he continued, "I have, as you probably know, been very ill and am still far from restored to health. Under these circumstances I crave your indulgence and permission to depart."

"Comrades all," said Bill, rising as John concluded, "considering as Sir Walter's life is of the highest importance and, I may say, value to us one and all, I beg your consent."

This speech, which seemed to be considered both sensible and humorous, silenced all further objection, and John, after having solemnly shaken hands with each man present, was conducted down the staircase and across the courtyard to the outer door.

He first proceeded to carefully wash his right hand, which had, he felt, been polluted by the touch of the miscreants, in a brook that babbled merrily by the roadside. After which he resumed his homeward way with much internal exultation.

“Ten days!” he exclaimed aloud, as he rapidly traversed the solitary road. “It is a lifetime. By then Rose and I shall be far beyond the reach of these men and their rascally companions.”

All the discomforts he had endured, all the dangers that surrounded him seemed illumined by the warm glow of joy and hope within him. The only dark spot was the thought of Rose’s resentment at his failure to keep their last appointment; but even that was swallowed up in his general bliss.

“The longest lane has a turning,” he cried, joyfully.

Had he been able to foresee the future he might have quoted with more appropriateness that other proverb which tells too sanguine mortals that “there is many a slip ’twixt the cup and the lip.”

CHAPTER XIII.

A LENGTHENED TETHER.

JOHN’S exultation at his prospective release from his galling bondage was not permitted to last long. Rose, who had previously been an almost daily visitor

to their place of meeting, had suddenly taken to absenting herself, and remained completely inaccessible.

Every evening found John watching in the ruined cottage, but Rose still kept away. That she should have been deeply offended by his failure to keep the previous appointment was natural, but to so persist in her indignation was unreasonable, and likely, if continued, to lead to the most disastrous consequences. Day after day slipped away, and the fateful twenty-seventh rapidly approached, and still no sign of her came to relieve his anxiety. In vain he wandered all day long through the town, in vain he sought a chance encounter in the neighborhood of her cottage, he was not rewarded with even the most casual glimpse of her.

His uneasiness increased as time went on. What was he to do? This contingency was altogether unforeseen, and he was at a loss how to act. To remain in Wickworth after the twenty-sixth was impossible, and yet to depart without again seeing Rose was more than he could endure. He determined at length to wait patiently until that night arrived; if then Rose still remained obdurate, he would, regardless of all risks, seek her in her own home, where, if he could see her, he had no doubt that he would be able easily to soothe her injured feelings, and persuade her to flight.

On the morning which he had resolved should be his last in Wickworth, he was swiftly and secretly completing his preparations for departure when Travers, who appeared to have no suspicions, entered his room, and informed him with a malicious grin,

that two gentlemen wished to see him. He refused to explain who they were, but insisted upon his at once accompanying him to the chamber in which they were awaiting him.

On entering, closely followed by Travers, who seemed to anticipate an attempt at escape on his part, he saw Mr. Merrill in a state of considerable perturbation, and a man of about thirty who was unknown to him.

John advanced with outstretched hand, but the older gentleman retired hastily behind the younger man, who drew himself up, and folding his arms, scowled so ferociously that John stopped in amazement.

“So, sirrah!” said the stranger, after a pause, in a tone of the deepest scorn. “You still have confidence enough to face an injured father.”

John could make nothing of this unexpected outburst. Who was this man? What injury had he at any time done to child or children of his, who, judging by their parent’s age, could be little more than infants?

“Are you stricken dumb, fellow?” asked the other, as John did not speak. “Or hath the consciousness of your villainy clogged your too fluent tongue?”

“Really,” stammered John. “You have the advantage of me. I am ignorant of how I can have wronged you or your children. I don’t remember ever seeing you before.”

“Bah!” cried the man. “This is trifling.”

“There, William,” murmured Mr. Merrill, “I forewarned you how it would be.”

“Peace, father. Leave it to me,” was the stern answer.

“Father !” said John to himself, a light breaking in upon his perplexity. Mr. Merrill was the injured parent, and the other was Mary’s brother.

“How long, Sir Walter,” continued the enraged young man. “How long is this shilly-shally to endure ?”

“Has not Miss Merrill told you—?” began John, but he stopped short. To recount before Travers the incidents of his last interview with the lady in question, would be to betray all, and frustrate his contemplated flight.

“There is no need of that, Sir Walter,” said his opponent. “My father is neither deaf nor blind. He informs me that since your recovery you have constantly and markedly neglected my sister. My sister, sir, to whom you are betrothed. I am here to demand an explanation, or—” and he tapped the hilt of his sword significantly.

John gazed round the room in bewilderment. Travers, with folded arms, and a smile of keen enjoyment on his evil face, leaned against the door, but offered no assistance. The young man stood awaiting his reply with an air of firm resolution, while Mr. Merrill was visibly ill at ease.

“What do you want of me ?” asked John.

“A plain and explicit answer to a simple question. Do you intend to espouse my sister Mary, or no ?”

John was beginning to lose his temper, and it was with equal confidence that he answered, “No.” The effect was instantaneous. The young man’s

hand leaped to his sword; the elder seized him, as if to prevent violence, while Travers, who had locked the door, glided between them, hissing into John's ear as he passed him: "Fool!"

"Patience a moment's space," he went on aloud. "Reason before bloodshed. What, my dear Walter, can be your objection?"

To state his distaste for the lady in the very presence of these men was not to be thought of, so he could only repeat his refusal to complete his engagement.

"Very well, sir," cried the brother, furiously, drawing his sword. "Defend yourself."

John realized that he was in a particularly dangerous situation. He had no love of fighting, had never even practised with the sword he wore, and was equally unwilling, either to kill this man, or, as was more likely, to be killed by him, and yet it was impossible to refuse the challenge.

"You know, sir," he cried, seeking for some loophole of escape. "You know that I cannot fight you."

"The taunt was worthy of you. There, there," he cried, flinging at John's feet an apparently heavy purse; "There is the paltry sum I owe you. Now, do you still refuse?"

"Yes," shrieked John in terror, "I do refuse."

"That you are a scoundrel, Sir Walter Carlingford, I have long suspected," said the other in a low tone of suppressed rage. "It is left for me to-day to brand you as a coward as well."

For a moment the wild idea occurred to John to

let this man kill him, and so put an end to all his misery, but the thought of Rose routed it at once. As long as her happiness was in question, his life was valuable, and he would not risk it in a combat with this man, who was probably a master of his weapon. But how could he avoid it? To his surprise, Travers, who had been gloating fiendishly over his terror and distress, now came to his assistance.

“Softly, softly, sir,” he said. “You do my poor, dear Walter wrong. My nephew is no coward. But you must reflect, he has been ill, and is still very weak. When he is quite recovered he will doubtless grant you the satisfaction you demand, unless—— unless we can persuade him to reconsider his decision. Come, Walter, confess that you spoke hastily, and that you will, as in all honor bound, fulfil your contract with the lady.”

“If I do——” cried John.

“Silence, fool!” exclaimed Travers, almost springing upon him, so quickly was he by his side. “Do as I bid you; it is your only chance.”

John hesitated for a moment only. After all, what did his consent matter now, whatever happened, whether he succeeded in seeing Rose or not, he must leave the place that night? He dared not risk staying until the evening when he was pledged to meet the ruffians, and once fairly quit of Wickworth, his promise did not matter. He would be forever free of this fiery brother and his vengeance.

“Yes,” he said, as if convinced by Travers’ arguments, “you are right, I spoke hastily, and without thinking; I consent.”

The young man sheathed his sword with a satisfied air, while Mr. Merrill shook John by the hand with unfeigned delight. He was anxious to carry him off at once to make his peace with Mary, but John pleaded indisposition, promising to present himself without fail on the morrow.

“To-morrow,” he exclaimed, as Travers left the room with his visitors, “to-morrow I shall be free of them all.”

John had some scruples about retaining the purse, which the young man, however, refused to take back. He owed Sir Walter the money, he declared, and he had better keep it now that he had got it. It contained a number of large gold pieces, of the value of which he was ignorant, though it was evidently great. It certainly was a most welcome supply, as he had previously been absolutely penniless, and he consoled himself by the reflection that he had at all events a better right to it than anybody else.

An hour after sunset found John approaching, for the last time, the cottage where he had passed so many pleasant hours. He was resolute not to leave without one more attempt to persuade Rose to accompany him. It could not be hard, he thought, to convince her that his previous neglect was due to no fault of his own, if he could only see her; and he determined, if she failed to appear that night, to go boldly to her cottage, and by hook or crook, obtain an interview with her.

Great was his joy when, on reaching the doorway, he saw in the dark room a darker figure.

“Rose, my dearest!” he cried rapturously, and

was about to rush into her arms, when the figure sprang upon him, and desperately endeavored to hurl him to the ground. He staggered back under the surprise and shock, and wrenching himself free from his unknown assailant, found himself face to face with a young man whose face was pale, and convulsed with fury.

“Where is she?” he said in a hoarse voice, “where is she, villain? Give her back to me.”

“She! who? what do you mean?” cried John in affright.

“Who? who?” gasped the other, “you know, you black-hearted scoundrel! you know. My sister, my little Rose. Where is she?”

“Good God, man! where? I don’t know. What do you mean?”

“She is gone. Fled from her home, and you know where. Give her back, give her back to me.”

His voice broke as he spoke, and he gave way to a passionate, heart-breaking outburst of grief.

It was long before John succeeded in convincing him that he was in reality guiltless, and ignorant of her whereabouts, and in persuading him to relate the circumstances of her disappearance.

Ten days before, Rose had gone out, as was frequently her custom, for a walk in the cool evening air. As she did not return at the usual hour, her brother had stepped into the road to look for her, when he heard, at some distance, a scream and a cry for help, followed by the clatter of a horse’s hoofs travelling at great speed, and gradually dying away in the distance. Disturbed and alarmed he had

watched and waited, but hour after hour passed and Rose did not return. Since that he had neither seen nor heard anything of her. Wild with grief, he had searched and inquired far and wide in vain. He had in his wanderings observed Sir Walter's frequent visits to the cottage, and had been led to suspect that he might know something of the matter. He had in consequence hidden himself there, and John's cry of "Rose" had convinced him that his suspicions were correct.

"Listen," said John, when he had finished, "that I love your sister is true. That I have been in the habit of meeting her here, I confess; but I swear before Heaven I know no more than you who is at the bottom of this damnable villainy."

"So help you God, Sir Walter—" said the man earnestly—"is this thing that you tell me true?"

"So help me God," said John, "it is. Moreover. I swear that I will set out at once, and never to rest or stay until I have found out the villain, and taken full revenge upon him."

The man still seemed doubtful; though John spoke in all honest earnestness, Sir Walter's reputation was clearly not unknown to him.

"In good sooth," he muttered, "I know not whether to credit you, or not."

"If you doubt me—" said John, "convince yourself. Come with me. Together we will wander through the world until we find her."

"I cannot," said the other in broken accents, "I have an aged mother, whom I may not leave. I will believe," he continued, after an irresolute pause,

“and may all ill light upon your head if you have betrayed me.”

“Amen !” said John.

“I do believe,” cried the man, warmly pressing his hand, “and when you have found her, bring her back, Sir Walter, stained or stainless bring her back to her broken-hearted mother.”

He stopped, his voice choked with grief; and once more wringing John’s hand, quitted him without another word.

Left to himself, John was sorely puzzled to discover the meaning of this strange event. For a long time, indeed, he was too overcome by sorrow to reflect seriously on the matter, but when he had gained partial relief by swearing bitter vengeance on its author, he found himself able to devote his thoughts to its consideration. One thing was certain, it was the doing either of Travers or of Mary. It was doubtful which. He was anxious to return, confront Travers, and accuse him of the wrong, but he concluded that it would be too dangerous, and that having escaped from his control, it would be better to remain out of his clutches.

With a burdened heart he rose at last, and started on his weary search. As he had no clue to Rose’s situation, it mattered not in which direction he travelled, and as the road he first entered upon led south, he followed that.

In time he found himself on the Common whose name was now so hateful in his ears.

Before advancing into the valley which stretched before him, he turned to gaze once more upon the town

which he was now leaving, and which he sincerely hoped he should never see again. The moon had risen and threw its dim and watery rays over the landscape at his feet. It was vague and misty, illumined only here and there by the windings of the river. Darkly lowering over the plain rose the hill on which the town stood, its gloom relieved in places by the late burning taper of some midnight watcher.

As he looked, the night on which he had made his futile experiment on the same spot returned upon his mind with marvellous clearness, and striding down the hill that sloped before him, he cursed the folly that had brought him to this pass.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT SEA.

IN spite of the numberless discomforts which occurred to John daily ; in spite of the rough entertainment afforded by even the best country taverns, the ill-cooked food, and unsavory drink, the absence of all the small luxuries which in his old life had appeared to him necessities ; in spite of the badness of the roads, which indeed were frequently little more than faintly marked tracks, where the eye needed to be ever on the alert to prevent the foot from straying from the path ; in spite of the want of accommodation for public travel which necessitated his

journeying either on horseback or on foot, of which alternatives he chose the latter ; in spite of these, and many other constant annoyances, which passed unnoticed by those around him because they had never known a better state of things ; in spite of all, John would at this time have been almost happy, had it not been for the perpetually recurring thought of Rose and her fate.

Starting in the morning before the dew was dry, only too glad to breathe the cool fresh air after the stifling atmosphere of the dirty ill-ventilated inn chamber, which he was lucky if he was able to occupy alone ; resting in some retired woodland nook, by murmuring streamside, during the middle heat of the day ; setting forth once more when the shadows began to stretch their lengthened fingers towards the east ; and arriving in the dim afterglow, to seek a welcome rest and supper in the roadside inn, or cottage ; day after day he wandered, following what road he would, for in his undirected search all were alike to him, keeping generally only a southward course ; escaped from the surveillance of the odious Travers, free to go where and do what he listed, he should have been happy. But Rose's doubtful fate was the one thought which blackened all the brightness of the scene. The bright summer sun and cloudless blue sky, the shifting lights and shadows of the woodlands, the glowing fires of sunset, and the silver gray of dawn, the sparkling waters and sweet-smelling flowers, all alike were shadowed by this haunting anxiety.

All trace of her was lost. He had not dared to

linger near Wickworth, to make inquiries in the neighborhood in which lay his only chance of gaining some first clue, of finding the first footstep on the track; and now that he was able without fear to question whom he would, it was too late. Ignorant as he was even of the most general direction of the course taken by her abductor, nothing but the most improbable chance could bring him across any trace of her. He was stung to madness by the thought that, as sunset after sunset found him still further to the south, she was possibly being carried further and further from him in the opposite direction.

He contemplated at one time making a complete circuit of Wickworth at a distance of about thirty miles, but the likelihood of any reward was not sufficient to compensate for the risk of venturing to remain even at that distance from the place, in which he had probably by then been denounced, far and wide, as a murderer. Chance alone, he knew, could aid him, and trusting to that he pursued his southward journey.

The country, though some of it had been well-known to him before his catastrophe, was strangely altered. Here and there he would recognize in some flaunting building new from the mason's hands, a house that he had known before, moss grown, ivy-clad, and gray with age; but for the most part all was strange.

In one place, where he had been accustomed to gaze from the hill top over a broad plain rich with the golden corn or waving grass, a dismal swamp met his astonished eye. The river, which had rolled

secure between its banks, wandered unfettered through the rustling reeds, or spread itself lazily in vast stagnant pools, where the swimming water-fowl cut little lanes through the green mantle that covered the steaming surface. All day long he toiled through the rank herbage that rose high above his head, sticking in the mire, turning aside now to avoid a stretch of bubbling black mud, now wandering lost in the reeds whence the noisy wild-fowl flew in clouds as he approached, almost poisoned by the foul exhalations of the treacherous ooze, it was not until the sun had sunk behind the hills on his right that he emerged, thankful for his numerous escapes from a horrible death, on the southern border of the pestiferous marsh.

A thick curtain of ghostly mist hung heavily over the place, but when he had mounted the hill in front of him to escape the death-bearing miasma, he flung himself among the heather still warm from the sun, too worn out to seek securer shelter, and slept until the sun was high next day.

So day after day, and week after week, he penetrated further and further to the south.

At last, on the evening of July the first, when the sun was already low, he found himself standing on the edge of a heathy plateau, across which he had been travelling for three days past. From his feet, to right and left as far as he could see, the rolling hill, broken by many a combe, curved steeply down. At its base lay a narrow strip of cultivated ground, beyond that a border of yellow sand, and then a broad stretch of blue sea. His journey for the present

was at an end, he could go on further south on foot.

Below him, a little to the right, a river, after washing the base of the eminence on which he stood, debouched into the sea. At its mouth stood a small town, where from either bank a rough stone pier running out some hundred yards formed, as they curved towards each other, a fairly secure harbor.

This town, John determined, should be his resting place for the night; the next day he would settle what his further course should be.

It is pitiful to remark with what undoubting confidence man plans and schemes for the morrow, aye, and many morrows after that, and how often Fate, with one touch of her mighty finger, oversets his frail card palaces. Little did John think that on the morrow, and for many a long day after, his course was to be settled without his concurrence.

The inn he found bore the sign of "The Three Sailors," and seemed to him fairly comfortable, as he understood comfort by then. He had long since ceased to expect the cosy bar parlor, with its bright glasses and rows of shining pewter vessels, the tidy sitting-room with its polished furniture and clean white tablecloth, so it was without any shock that he entered the public room, a long, low, badly lighted apartment, filled with rough men whose pervading flavor of fish and tar betrayed their occupation.

As he stood for a moment in the doorway, a man at the further end of the room got up hastily and left by another door; but, though even in the darkness there seemed something familiar to John about the figure, he thought no more of it, and calling for a

mug of ale he sat himself down by the side of a somewhat ill-favored, sailor-like man, who made grudging room for him.

"One of the expedition, master?" queried he gruffly.

"No," said John. "What expedition do you mean?"

"Nay, nay," answered the man hastily. "I spake but idly. I know of no expedition. A stranger in these parts, mayhap?"

"Yes." John said he was but newly arrived.

"Ah!" said the man. "And what may one call thee?"

"My name is John Stuart," he replied, for since his escape he had left off his borrowed title.

"What tidings upon the London road?" was the next question.

John briefly answered that he knew of none. He did not relish the man's looks, or the tone and inquiring nature of his conversation, and felt considerably relieved when he rose, apparently in answer to a low whistle from outside, and left him with a surly "good-night."

Supper came at length, and so hungry was he that he ate with zest what a few short months before would have filled him with loathing. At intervals, along the unwashed clothless tables, were placed huge wooden bowls in which lumps of meat and bread floated in a greasy soup, and from which each man helped himself to what he liked, as best he might.

Coarse oil lamps threw an uncertain light upon

the scene, and as soon as he had satisfied the first cravings of his appetite, John was glad to escape from the mingled odors of the room. Informing the host that he would be back in less than an hour, and requesting him to keep a bed for him, he turned his back upon the inn door, which, though he knew it not, he was never again to enter.

He made his way to one of the jetties he had seen from the hill, and remained there for some time, enjoying the fresh sea-breeze, and lazily watching the shipping of the harbor. This consisted for the most part of small fishing boats ; but anchored in the centre was a larger vessel, on board of which all seemed hurry and confusion. The murmur of many voices and hoarse orders, softened by distance, fell pleasantly upon the ear, while boats were constantly gliding to and fro, between the ship and the quays. It was evident that her departure was imminent.

A man wrapped in a heavy boat-cloak, though the night was warm, was lounging at the pier-head, and to him John addressed himself :

“ What ship is that ? ”

“ The White Lily,” answered the man, in a low muffled voice.

“ Whither bound ? ”

“ Faith, I know not,” said the stranger, moving off as if to avoid further parley.

What were there about his figure, concealed as it was, his scarce heard voice, and his gait that were vaguely familiar ? The thought passed through his mind and was forgotten, as he turned once more to examine the ship.

He was not altogether unacquainted with craft, but this was such an one as he had never seen before. She was very much higher fore and aft than in the waist, so that she appeared to have, as it were, a house built on the maindeck at either end. That in the bows was dark and lowering, and was apparently pierced for guns; the one at the stern was brilliantly lighted, rays coming from within from a double tier of windows which ran one above the other along both sides, and judging from the illumination on the surrounding boats, across the stern. She had two masts, and at the top of the mainmast was a crow's-nest to contain armed men. She was not by any means a large ship, but was evidently designed for fighting if occasion should require it.

The expedition he had heard mentioned occurred to John, and as he slowly retraced his steps along the pier, he wondered what could be the object of a ship fitting out so hastily in such a small port.

Across the shore end of the pier was a gateway, under which John, as he approached, perceived the figure of a man. To his surprise the man, as he was about to enter, barred the way with a pike presented at his breast, crying :

“Who goes there?”

“Halloa!” he cried in astonishment. “What the deuce is the meaning of this?”

“The password,” exclaimed his obstructor. “The password.”

“Password!” said John. “Surely there’s no need of that. I came onto the pier without one, so I should think I might go off.”

“The password, and speedily,” reiterated the other.

“Oh! this is perfectly ridiculous,” said John, laughing in spite of his vexation—“Stand aside and let me pass.”

“Stand back,” said the man, enforcing his command by slightly advancing his weapon.

John was in doubt what to do when he heard a step behind him, and remembering the stranger he had encountered at the pierhead, was about to turn and ask for his assistance when he felt himself suddenly enveloped in the folds of a cloak thrown over him from behind, and grasped tightly in a pair of strong arms, against whose grip he struggled vainly. His efforts were futile; his unknown assailant had evidently assistance at hand, and he was quickly and deftly bound with a rope still wrapped securely in the cloak. He was then lifted from the ground and carried, as it seemed to him, down some steps, but the thick garment almost stifled him, and in a few moments he fainted away.

When he recovered he was stretched on the floor of a small wooden closet, faintly illumined by the rays of a lamp outside, which found scant admittance through an aperture above the door. He was unbound, but the door was locked, and there seemed to be no other opening. He was parched with thirst, and finding by his side a loaf of coarse bread and a flagon of ale, he greedily drained it to the dregs, without thinking what he did. He had no idea what hour it was, but all was silent, and though he shouted and hammered on the door, he received no answer.

Presently a growing dizziness and languor attacked

him, and he began to suspect, as he should have done sooner, that the liquor he had swallowed had been drugged. He strove for a long time against the feeling of sleepiness, but it was hopeless, and before long he fell into a profound dreamless slumber.

When he awoke, all question as to his situation was at an end.

He was unmistakably on board ship, and that ship was engaged at the moment in tussling with a pretty lively sea. He was lying in the berth of a cabin, which had a window looking out to the stern of the vessel, and, as he felt too weak and ill to move, he contented himself with remaining where he was, watching the toppling waves that followed in the wake. As the stern sank down, a great green billow angrily tipped with foam would climb up, up, up, higher and higher, rushing down upon the struggling ship, as if about to overwhelm it. Then, just as it seemed upon the point of dashing through the window opposite John, it seemed to slip out of sight, and the stern was swung high into the air, only to sink once more into the following trough, giving him a perfectly appalling sensation of dizzy sickness. He had always been a first-rate sailor, but it was clear that Sir Walter's anatomy adapted itself but ill to the motion of the waves, and before long John was racked with all the hideous torments of sea-sickness.

The woodwork around him creaked and groaned as the good ship battled bravely with the surges; sounds of trampling feet, shouts, and the rattle of chains fell unheeded on his ear. He neither knew nor cared to think how he had come there at all;

what ship he was on, and whither bound, were matters of the utmost indifference. He only wished for death to relieve his sufferings. At times he fell into a troubled and uneasy doze, but only to awake again to renewed misery.

Occasionally, a man came to him and gave him hot ale and bread, of which he partook sparingly, without gratitude or wonder. He did not even feel surprise at the discovery that the man who attended him was the one who had addressed him in the public room of "The Three Sailors." He was in no mood for speculation, and if he had suddenly found himself in his old home, among his old friends at Wickworth, it would have occasioned him no astonishment.

For ten days he suffered these afflictions, but on the morning of the eleventh, when he awoke, he felt more like himself; the sea had gone down and the vessel rode easily over the long swelling rollers. He managed to rise from his couch, and when, after having given him his breakfast, which he devoured ravenously, his attendant suggested that the captain would like to see him if he felt equal to the exertion, he acquiesced at once.

The door of his cabin gave onto a passage which ran lengthwise down the centre of the ship, opening into the lower part which formed her waist, but instead of pursuing this, his guide opened a door on the opposite side of the passage, and motioned John to enter, shutting the door behind him when he had done so.

A man, whom he concluded to be the captain, was sitting at a table suspended from the ceiling, with

his back to the entrance, and he was so placed as to be between John and the window.

After waiting for some time, as the man neither moved nor spoke, and seemed quite unconscious of his presence, John was about to advance and address him, when he suddenly raised his head from the writing in which he had appeared to be absorbed, and turned round.

As his eyes fell upon him, John staggered back as though he had been shot, for he saw before him the evil smile and yellow countenance of Richard Travers.

CHAPTER XV.

GENTLEMEN-DISCOVERERS.

“WELCOME, my dear Walter, welcome to the White Lily!” cried Travers, rising to salute John, with well feigned astonishment. “An this be not a pleasant surprise, I am no true man.”

“Nonsense,” said John, sternly, ignoring his proffered hand. “I’ve had enough of your blarney. What is the meaning of this? Why am I here?”

“Come you not to join our expedition?”

“Expedition! What expedition? You know that I don’t. I was dragged here by force, and demand to be instantly released.”

“Released! I should be sorely put to it to compass that, sith land is far enough away by now. Here you are and here I’ll warrant you must fain rest and make the best of it.”

"But how did I come here?" said John, who was unable to find any answer to Travers' reasoning.

"Nay," he answered, "what matter, since you are here? I assured you, months ago, that you could not escape me. You would not credit me then, perchance you are more docile now. A good friend of mine—aye, and of yours, too—espied you in the 'Three Sailors' tavern, and I made shift to have you conveyed on board, thinking it a shame that my nephew should not share profits in our enterprise."

"What is this enterprise, anyhow?" said John, impatiently.

"A fair and doughty one, as you shall soon see for yourself, and one that bids fair to make all our fortunes."

At this moment a sailor entered the cabin, and addressing Travers, said:

"A sail, master on the larboard bow."

"How far?"

"Somewhat better than two miles."

"Lay your course for her, and I will be on deck anon. Will you come, Walter? She is a gallant ship and a tall, and well worth the seeing."

When they reached the deck John, in spite of his disgust at having been kidnapped so shamefully, could not resist a feeling of exultation at the prospect. It was a bright day, with a fresh breeze which careened the ship slightly; while filling her huge mainsail it drove her briskly through the blue water which stretched away on all sides to a horizon unbroken by any land.

About two miles off, sailing on a course almost

parallel with their own, was another rather smaller ship, which, judging by "the bone in her mouth," as sailors call the wave under her forefoot, was also making good headway.

After his long confinement, the air and sunshine were like wine to John, and he stood by the bulwark on the raised stern enjoying the change.

On board all was activity ; and when he looked to see what was the employment on which the sailors were engaged, he was surprised to see that some of the men were occupied in piling shot upon the deck, others carrying up powder into the poop, from either side of which frowned four pieces of ordnance, while others again, under the orders of a grizzle-bearded old gunner, were carefully cleaning and loading one of two long brass swivels which were stationed on the roof of the fortress, for the forecastle of the ship was practically that.

Was this a man-of-war on which he was embarked ? And, if so, with what nation was England at war ? And how came it that Travers was in such a position ?

By this time the two ships had approached within easy pistol-shot of each other, the White Lily being about half her length ahead.

"Hath she displayed her ensign yet ?" said Travers, returning from a general visit of inspection, to a man who stood with the signal-halliards in his hand and a pile of parti-colored flags on the deck at his feet.

"No, sir," was the answer.

"Jonas," cried Travers, "give her a gun."

The gunner, who had been waiting impatiently

with his piece ready trained and burning linstock in hand, after having slightly altered the direction of his aim, fired. The ball splashed the foam high in the air about ten yards in front of the vessel and, after two or three long hops beyond her, disappeared.

The hint was taken at once, and before the gunner had finished cleaning and reloading, the English colors floated above the beautiful stranger, who still, however, continued her course.

"What colors shall I show her, sir? The old ones?" said the signalman, with a grin.

"No, no, you fool; not yet. Show her the English," was the reply. "Are you ready there, Jonas?"

"Aye, aye, sir," was the gruff answer.

"Then give her another to bring her to, and mark you, a trifle closer this time. Quartermaster, bear off more to starboard and bring her round on the other tack."

Both orders were promptly obeyed; the shot passed high over the other's deck, piercing the mainsail, while the *White Lily*, after bearing off a trifle for sea-room, was brought about neatly and ran up alongside the stranger, whose mainsail had been promptly lowered at the second shot. Grapnels were quickly thrown on board fore and aft, and the two ships lay closely hugged together, the larboard guns of the *White Lily* dominating the stern works of the other.

John was wondering what could be the meaning of this strange treatment of a friendly vessel, a feeling which was apparently shared by all on board of her, when a cry of horror burst from her occupants, and he saw them gazing at something overhead with

pale, terror-stricken faces. Casting his eyes upward he instantly perceived the cause. Above him, instead of the English flag that had floated there, now flapped and fluttered in the breeze one of plain black.

For an instant he saw, with horrible particularity, the men pouring over the bulwarks of the *White Lily* and leaping, cutlass in hand, upon the deck of the doomed ship, where the crew, too late, made an ineffectual rush for their arms, and then with a groan he fled from the deck and shut himself into his cabin.

But though he had escaped the hideous sight he could not shut out the horrid sounds. Wild yells and curses, the shrieks of dying men, the rapid clash and rattle of steel against steel, an occasional shot, formed a turmoil which his efforts were unable to exclude.

Suddenly the ship heeled over and shuddered from stem to stern, as the roar of the guns drowned momentarily all other sounds, and an instant after a loud shout of triumph burst from an hundred dillainous throats.

The ill-fated ship had struck.

The tramp of hurrying feet resounded overhead, the staggering steps of men bearing heavy weights stumbled past his door, while John lay stretched upon his couch in a state of helpless horror. This last stroke of destiny was worse than all.

Presently he heard the order to cast off given and repeated on deck, and he felt that the ship was once more moving through the waters. Raising his eyes, after a time, he saw, through the stern window, a

sight that chilled his blood. About a mile astern floated, helplessly, the ship he had seen that morning cutting the waves in all her splendor. A column of heavy black smoke rolled sullenly up from her high into the air and drifted down the wind. Fascinated in spite of himself, he remained at the window. The flames ran swiftly up the stays, the mast tottered for a moment and fell overboard with a crash, a pyramid of fire burst from the deck and then, with a dull boom that rattled the casement before him, the ship blew up—a flash of brilliant flame—a cloud of gray vapor dotted with fiery fragments hurled on high—and she was gone forever from human ken.

The silence on board was almost oppressive after the previous tumult; but what was that hollow plunge that, now and again, broke ominously upon his listening ear? Gazing down into the swirling waters in the wake of the ship, he saw presently, hurled here and there among the eddying foam wreathes, the body of a man pierced with a ghastly wound, but still struggling and fighting with the waves in his death agony; and staggering from the window he looked no more.

He was not left long to suffer his terrible despair undisturbed.

The door of his cabin opened, and a man entering shook him roughly by the shoulder.

“Come, come, Sir Walter,” said a voice he knew too well, “the fighting is over and there is nought to fear.”

John leaped to his feet, but the evidence of his eyes was not needed to assure him that he was not mis-

taken. Before him, a sneer of contempt upon his ugly face, stood Bill Wringley.

"You here!" he cried.

"Aye, here am I," said Bill. "You little thought to see me, I'll be sworn. A pretty trick you played on me and Dick,—but I'll have vengeance yet."

"Is—is he here, too?" stammered John, overwhelmed by the blow upon blow that ill-fate kept dealing him.

"Take care!" cried Bill, fiercely. "You are secure here, and you know it; but take care. Don't try a man too far, for flesh and blood can't stand it. You know he is not here. Poor Dick, he was a trusty mate, which is more than I can say of some that call themselves his betters."

"How should I know where he is?" said John.

"A murrain on thee; of course you do not. You are the most guileless man on earth. You know not that you left me and Dick in the lurch, and that like fools we went upon the job alone, and that you, having roused the house, we were expected. I barely made my escape, and poor Dick, I fear, was trapped."

"I swear I never warned them," cried John, and indeed, in his hasty departure, he had forgotten to do so, though he had fully intended it.

"Do you think I'm a fool? No, no, Sir Walter, look to yourself; as long as my eye is on you, you are safe. I am too anxious to see you grace an English gallows to do you harm myself; but look to it you don't try to give me the slip, for I would find you if you took shelter in the nethermost pit. And now, come to the captain."

"I won't," said John, shortly.

"Won't! Whew!" said Bill. "Won't, to your lawful captain. Josiah Knocknaile," he added, raising his voice, "I have need of you."

The man who had attended John during his illness slouched into the cabin, and gazed at him, shaking his head, with the same contemptuous sneer that Bill had worn.

"The pity of it, the pity!" he said, as if addressing himself to the surrounding air. "To think that Sir Walter should prove himself to be a lily-livered coward."

"Coward?" cried John, furiously, knocking him off his feet with a well-planted blow, "take that, then, for a coward's mark!"

The man, white with fury, snatched a knife from the sheath at his belt, and, struggling to his feet, would have sprung upon John had not Bill interfered.

"Put up thy knife, man," he said, sternly, "and help me bring Sir Walter before the captain. Now, sir, march."

John, seeing resistance was useless, quietly acquiesced, and, followed by his two guards, proceeded to Travers' cabin.

"So, sirrah!" said Travers, coldly, when the men had withdrawn, "it would seem that you are a coward."

"I have yet to learn," answered John, indignantly, "that hatred of crime is cowardice."

"Crime! Bah!" said Travers, with a sneer.

"Yes, sir," cried John, in rising wrath, "most

damnable villainy. You have entrapped me and made me a prisoner ; but do what you will, you shall never make me a pirate."

"Pirate! What is that? I am a gentleman discoverer on the way to adventure on the Spanish main."

"And you destroy a defenseless countryman by way of practice, I suppose."

"The ship was mine by right of discovery."

The discussion was long, and their tempers grew hot, and their voices high before the end ; but John would not retreat one step from his first position, and heaped insult and ignominy upon Travers, in the hope of spurring him on to draw upon him, and so kill him, or be killed, and make an end. But, though his face grew pale and his lip trembled with rage, Travers had evidently some purpose which he hoped to compel or induce John to serve, and confined himself to words.

"Once for all—" cried John, in conclusion—"I will have no hand in this affair. I am your prisoner, but I warn you I shall attempt to escape at the first opportunity, and in the meantime I will not draw a sword or fire a shot if the safety of the whole shipful of cutthroats demanded it."

"Please yourself," retorted Travers, "an you choose to be despised and branded as a coward, I care naught."

"Let the man who calls me coward beware lest I hear him then. I have already given one of your desperadoes a lesson to that effect, and I will repeat it on the first offender, be he high or low."

“A most spirited gamecock, when the danger is past,” snarled Travers, if you fight every man on board who calls you coward, you will, methinks, find sufficient work for your hands. But let me commend you, for your own sake, to keep your opinion of our venture to yourself. You may not find all as tolerant as I am, and, though I am most desirous of your security, I cannot answer for my followers.”

“I can answer for it,” cried John, “that they will meet their just dues some day—on the gallows, and you amongst them.”

With which words he left the cabin, pursued by a peal of mocking laughter.

CHAPTER XVI.

REUNITED.

FROM that time forward, John was practically a prisoner in his own cabin. Not that any attempt was made to restrict his personal liberty; he was free to wander whither he would on board, but he had no wish to consort with any of the gang of miscreants, among whom he recognized most of the men whom he had encountered in the dark house at Wickworth; and they, on their parts avoided him with unconcealed contempt.

True to his project of escaping at the earliest opportunity he devoted himself, on all possible occasions,

to secretly accumulating such stores and provisions as he thought would be useful in case he should be able at some future time to secure a boat. These he concealed in his cabin as he obtained them. He never left it during the day, but at night when the deck was deserted, save by the watch, he crept out to enjoy, as far as he could enjoy anything in his miserable condition, the fresh air and sea-breeze.

Through the whole month of August, and a large part of September, the *White Lily* sailed on, now here now there, but generally, as far as John could make out in a westerly direction, her course not unfrequently marked temporarily by a column of smoke by day, and by night by a flaming beacon, tipping the summits of the Atlantic rollers with long lines of ruddy light, rising and falling, rising and falling, fading further and further away in the distance until it disappeared.

John's persistent refusal to take any part in these deeds of blood was fiercely resented by the crew, who, like most villains, while utterly regardless of the opinion of the world at large, writhed under the knowledge that one actually among them scorned and loathed them for their unbridled wickedness. It required all Travers' influence to prevent their removing by force such an unpleasant reminder of what they were from their midst. More than once, John's firm demeanor, and readiness to defend himself in a righteous cause, had alone saved him from an attack.

So matters continued, an explosion continually threatening, until the twenty-third of September.

On the afternoon of that day, John, who had by

that time learned to know too well all the sounds of preparation, gathered that another vessel was about to undergo the assault of this remorseless foe.

The victim on that occasion, proved a most unwilling one, and her resistance was long and stout, but the ruffians, if they had no other merits, were brave or rather reckless, and after a running fight, which must have endured upwards of two hours, the yell of triumph, which foreboded a merciless and cruel death to so many fellow-creatures, burst once more upon his shuddering ear.

During this period he had been torn with doubt and apprehension. He could not but pray for the success of the other vessel, though he knew that the defeat of the *White Lily* would entail upon him an ignominious doom, for his bare assertion that he was with them as a captive would never obtain credence in the face of the entire gang, who would undoubtedly, when their own case was hopeless, swear to a man that he was one of them heart and soul.

But now the roar of the guns, the shrieks and groans of the wounded and dying, were succeeded by the hurried bustle which accompanied the removal of the valuables from the captured ship.

John had relapsed into that state of hopeless mental depression which was his usual frame of mind, when he was roused from his stupor by the scream of a woman from the passage outside his cabin door. He flung it upon, and saw the scoundrel Knocknaile bearing in his arms the dainty figure of a girl, who seemed to have just swooned away after her unavailing struggles. Her head hung limp over his shoulder,

and her hair, which had come unbound swept in long waves down his back.

To his unutterable amazement and horror, he saw that it was his long lost Rose!

He endeavored to rush to her rescue, but another man who was following, thrust him violently back, saying:

“No, no, my master, those who will not play the game, cannot expect to draw the stakes.”

Knocknaile in the meantime had deposited his lifeless burden in the next cabin, and locking the door upon her walked off with the key, both men turning to grin maliciously in his face, leaving him in a state of overwhelming dismay.

His astonishment at his beloved Rose's presence in such an unexpected position was swallowed up by his horror at the contemplation of her awful fate. He scarcely dared to imagine what it would be.

Rose, unprotected in the hands of those ruthless villains, and he so near and yet so powerless to help her! No, a thousand times no; come what might, he would find some refuge for her, were it but death in each other's arms. If all else failed the ocean depths should be their haven.

It was too horrible; when he had thought that his condition could not be rendered more appalling, that fate could have nothing worse in store for him, there came this cruel blow to drive him further down into the abyss of despair.

The planks between his cabin and the next had become slightly warped, as that there was a small crack, which he hastened to enlarge with his dagger

until it was sufficiently open to enable a whisper to penetrate from one room to the other. It was placed fortunately close to the head of the berth on which she was lying, and so could not be far removed from her ear.

He had scarcely achieved his purpose, when a long sigh, followed by a heart-rending moan told him that the hapless girl had returned to consciousness, and a comprehension of her miserable situation.

Pressing his lips to the opening, he whispered her name as loudly as he dared. A moment's silence ensued, during which neither breathed, and then she said in a startled whisper:

"What is that? Who is there?"

"Hush! darling," he whispered eagerly, in an agony of fear lest she should scream.

"For God's sake, make no noise! It is I, dearest Rose, Walter."

A groan of agony was her only answer.

"I am like yourself, a prisoner," he said hastily, understanding the thoughts that passed through her mind.

"A prisoner!" she exclaimed, almost joyfully. "Thank God! you are not one of——one of these villains?"

"No, no, dearest heart," he answered. "How could you think it?"

"Forgive me," she said. "Forgive me, I knew not what to think. Oh, what will become of me, what will become of me?" And she burst into a flood of tears.

"Listen, dearest," said John. "Have you a window there?"

“Yes, yes, there is a window.”

“Then it must be next to mine. As soon as it is dark—not yet—open it softly, and then we can talk without fear of being overheard; and now keep a good heart, and trust in Heaven, for one way or another I will save you, and we may yet be happy. Good-bye, darling, till dark.”

His attempt, in the meantime, to find out whether Travers knew who the girl was whom he had captured, and what his previous acquaintance with her had been was a complete failure. He found him gloating over the wealth of the captured ship, and he scarcely referred to the girl at all. He merely remarked with a sneer that in such cases it was the invariable custom to draw lots, and affected to condole with his dear Walter on the obstinacy which had prevented his having a chance of winning so fair a prize. He appeared to be absolutely ignorant of the fact that she came from Wickworth, or that Sir Walter had ever known anything of her.

As soon as it was quite dark John tapped softly on the panelling, and then gently opened the window of his cabin. In a moment he heard the next one opened, and saw, in the faint light reflected from the white foam which the ship left swirling in her wake as she drove through the water, a figure which he knew was Rose.

They were too far removed to do more than clasp hands, but the touch of Rose's soft fingers, which he had despaired of ever feeling again, seemed to revive hope and joy in John's breast.

After the first reciprocal assurances of unaltered

devotion, John gave her a short account of his sufferings since they last met, explaining incidentally the reason of his failure to keep their last appointment, and then begged her to tell him by what strange fatality she came there.

Her story was very brief and threw no light on the real mystery—whose handiwork her abduction had been. On her way back from the cottage, on the night when John had been unable to go, she had been suddenly seized from behind, her cries muffled by a cloak thrown over her head, and in this helpless condition lifted into the arms of a man on horseback who rode off at full gallop. Being but a weak woman it was not long before she fainted away. When she came to, she was in a strange chamber where she was detained for many days. One night she had been once more blindfolded and carried on shipboard, being ignorant of her conductors or her destination. She had been ill, and so lost count of time, but believed that they had been at sea some weeks before they had that day, after a desperate resistance, fallen into the hands of the buccaneers. Here, overcome by the recollection of the dangers that encompassed her, which in the joy of again encountering her dear Walter she had for a time forgotten, she began wofully to lament her cruel lot.

John, however, consoled and encouraged her, assuring her that it could not be long before he should be able to secure one of the boats, and so enable them to make their escape, and promising that, if by any ill fortune her danger should grow imminent, he

would kill her and himself afterwards, sooner than any wrong should be done her.

And now the ill luck that had so long dogged the footsteps of these unfortunate lovers seemed for a while, though only for a while, to relent, and for a few days to take them into favor.

The next morning, shortly after daylight, the look out announced that far a stern was a tall ship sailing down in pursuit of them, and Travers, concluding that his evil deeds had become known at length, resolved that instant flight away to the west was his only chance of safety. So all that day, under all the sail she could carry, the ship stood bravely on out into unknown seas, and all that day, and for five more, the pursuer held on after; every night she was lost to sight in the gathering darkness, and every dawn showed her still nearer following on the track, and in the fear and excitement of the chase, Rose and John were alike forgotten.

At last, when daylight came on the twenty-ninth, the horizon all around was unbroken, saving far ahead by a dim blue cloud, pale in the distance, which all knew to be land, though what land no man on board could tell, and for that they made, being by that time sorely in need of fresh water.

It was a fair and pleasant land, with cool fresh streams and plenteous store of fruit, and high rocky cliffs and towering mountain summits, a most agreeable sight to eyes weary of the monotony of the ocean.

Hour after hour the boats pulled back and forth from the anchorage to the shore, filling the casks with water, and still, when darkness shut down, by the

light of flaring torches the work went on ; for Travers was anxious to be off and away again, not knowing how near the avenger of his crimes might be.

John was lounging, as was his custom after dark, at the stern, which was quite deserted by the crew, when, gazing down into the water, watching the phosphorescent spheres, like floating pearls, which were whirled past the ship by the tide race, he saw floating alongside, apparently forgotten, a boat in which Travers had returned some hours back from a visit on shore to reconnoitre.

Here he thought was his chance. It was a very slight one, but it was the only one, and his determination to try it was increased when he overheard Travers announce that next morning the long deferred drawing of lots would certainly take place.

Quickly unfastening the rope, he let the boat drift with the tide until she was under the stern, and then refastening it, as nearly over his own window as he could judge, he slipped down into his cabin, and locked the door.

By the aid of a stick he succeeded in securing the rope, and having cut it as far above his head as he could reach, he tied it to the bar of his window. Then, having in a whisper communicated to Rose his intentions, and begged her to get ready with all speed, he hastened once more on deck.

Everything for once seemed to turn out in his favor. The watch was carelessly kept, as they were at anchor, and only one man stood on the forecastle, watching with longing eyes the rest of the crew who were carousing merrily round a huge fire which they

had built on shore ; Travers, who knew how wise it was to give his desperadoes a little relaxation when it was compatible with safety, having spared them a cask of ale for their gratification.

John, while the roars of laughter and ribald songs rang faintly on his ears, hastily retied the rope in its original position, having previously unravelled the cut end to give it as far as possible the appearance of having broken, and then once more sought his cabin.

He now reaped the advantage of the preparations he had been so long and secretly making. The stern windows projected as far over the water that he was enabled to bring the boat directly underneath him, and holding her in position with one hand, he rapidly and silently lowered the stores, which he had accumulated, with the other until all were safe on board.

The only difficulty now was to place Rose in the same position.

It was luckily no great height, for the ship was barely of one hundred tons burden, and Rose was country-bred and strong.

Sliding down the rope, he managed with some difficulty to secure his own footing on board the little craft. He had provided Rose with a rope tied at intervals into stout knots, and down this, when he had brought the boat under her window, she succeeded in scrambling with more agility than he had given her credit for, and stood at length wrapped once more in his fond embrace.

But this was no time for endearments. Handing her to the stern he bade her sit still and keep silence, while he cut the rope which bound them to the ship,

and instantly the boat was whirled around and swept away by the ebb tide.

At the same moment the boat gave a heavy lurch, and a slight scream escaped from Rose.

"Hush, Rose dearest! for God's sake, don't cry out," said John, in an agonized whisper.

"Oh, Walter, come hither quickly," she answered in a terrified voice.

"What is it?" he said, stumbling over the heap of goods which still lay in confusion in the bottom of the boat.

"There's—there's a man behind me, holding on to the boat," she whispered in terror.

John started up in astonishment, and saw, sure enough, dark against the reflections of the White Lily's stern windows which were already some distance away, the head and shoulders of a man.

He was doubtful what to do. To knock him on the head with an oar would have been easy enough, but he shrank from killing any man in cold blood; and yet to take him on board was the only other alternative, and a very dangerous one; but after some hesitation he resolved to do so.

As the boat swept round a projecting corner of the cliff, and the lights of the pirate ship vanished, he succeeded, not without a narrow escape from capsizing, in helping the man, who had not yet spoken a word, into the boat.

"Come aboard, sir," he said, shaking himself like a Newfoundland dog.

"Who in the devil's name are you?" cried John.

"You have not escaped me yet, Sir Walter," was

the answer. "I had an eye to you, for all your slyness. Where you go, I go. You know me—Bill Wringley. And now, sir, if so be as you take my advice, you will just lay to one oar, while I lay to the other, or we shall be broad-side on to the breakers before another ten minutes."

And John, in a maze of doubt and astonishment, obeyed without a word.

CHAPTER XVII.

CAST AWAY.

IT was well for them that in the past weeks John had gathered a good store of provisions, and had had foresight to put on board also a barrel of fresh water, for before long a storm of wind and rain came down out of the north and drove them before it like a feather.

For six days they sped on, whither they knew not, happy only that they narrowly escaped destruction in the heavy sea. Their supply of water was soon exhausted, but the rain that poured down, though it soaked them to the skin, also warded off the lingering agonies of thirst. During all this time Bill Wringley manfully took his share of the work while John rested.

He had, it seemed, overheard John's conversation with Rose one evening, and from that time had watched them like a cat. On the night of their escape, when the rest went on shore, he had volunteered

to remain as sentinel on board, a post which the others were only too glad to resign to him. He had observed John's restlessness, and creeping stealthily to the stern, had from above followed all his preparations. Had he been able, he frankly owned to John, he would have prevented their flight, but as he was single-handed, he knew that it was impracticable, and so, having determined to accompany them, had slid down a rope into the water and got on board, as has been told.

"But why?" said John. "Were you not comfortable on board?"

"Aye, master, comfortable enough; but my place is by you, and I will see you safe in old England before I leave you."

John shuddered at this vindictive resolution, while Rose seemed astonished and touched at such unlooked-for devotion.

In the meantime Bill, without another word on the subject, turned to and did his best for the safety of all on board; of comfort there was no possibility. Indeed, they owed their final preservation to him, for the constant exposure and hard fare were beginning to tell on Rose, who was visibly sinking, while even John was getting lamentably weak and ill.

On the evening of the sixth day the storm, instead of abating, seemed to grow worse every hour. The rain rushed down, shutting them in as with a shroud, and the wind howled so furiously above that it was only by shouting his loudest that Bill managed, shortly after dark, to convey to John the fearful intelligence, "breakers ahead."

John looked, and beheld, not a hundred yards away, a stretch of leaping, roaring waves, and spouts and pillars of wind-lashed foam.

He strove to snatch the tiller from Bill, who was steering, but he thrust him back and held straight on, shouting through the deafening uproar:

“It is our sole chance. If we attempt to put about we shall be swamped in a trice.”

John recognized the truth of this, and went forward to where Rose had lain for sometime unconscious of her misery and danger, determined if the worst should come, to make a desperate attempt to save her or to die with her should he fail.

In another minute they were in the centre of the mad turmoil of water; one column of foam, flung fan-shaped high into the air, came plunging down upon them, half filling the boat; another such would have finished it. A huge wave came rolling and surging in behind them, threatening them with instant destruction; for a moment it hung poised above them, and then, sweeping onwards, it swung them up, and literally hurled them over the threatening barrier-reef into comparatively calmer water.

Still the boat flew on before the shrieking gale, and John expected every instant to be dashed upon the rocks. Ahead, to right and left he could hear the mighty rollers breaking in awful thunder on the cliffs. Nearer and nearer still. They should be among them now! Gathering Rose's inanimate form into his arms, he prepared to leap for life as soon as they should strike.

But what was this? The roaring of the waters,

which had been in their very ears, was now dying quickly away behind them, the spindrift ceased to lash them, the wind suddenly dropped, and they floated motionless upon an unruffled sea. He called to Bill, but received no answer, and he was ignorant as to whether he was still on board, or had been swept over in that raging whirlpool. It was pitch dark, and he could not see from one end of the boat to the other, so it was useless to seek any explanation until dawn. Where they were, and by what magic that fearful tempest had been stilled in an instant, was utterly out of his power to discover, so, giving up the attempt, he yielded to the claims of exhausted nature and slept profoundly.

When he opened his eyes his first thought was that he had awakened in fairyland. He was still in the boat, but instead of a stormy waste of troubled sea, he beheld a glassy stretch of waveless water. It was so clear that he could see, far beneath him, a world of strange fantastic rocks, covered with seaweed of every imaginable hue, in and out of which darted fish of unaccustomed shape and gorgeous color. The floor of smooth, white sand was strewn with curious, many-tinted shells, among which crawled and scrambled sea-beasts of grotesque shape and extraordinary size. Further away, the mirror-like surface reflected faithfully every detail of the surrounding scene, and indeed it was of a beauty that would bear repetition.

The lagoon in which they floated was apparently encircled on all sides but one by lofty and inaccessible cliffs. To the north a valley, whose precipitous sides were clothed with a dense forest of resplendent flow-

ers and luxuriant foliage quite unknown to him, clove away through the heart of the rocky barriers until, far above, it was blocked by the gloomy cliffs of an overhanging mountain. All round at the foot of the enclosing walls was a border of level ground covered with an intricate confusion of tropical vegetation.

How they had gained admittance to this terrestrial paradise was at the time a mystery to him, but he discovered afterwards that in the iron-bound cliffs that sheltered it from the ocean surges there was one narrow and almost undiscoverable opening into which it had been their good fortune to be driven—the only haven of safety in all that inhospitable coast.

The sun was already high, and the heat almost unpleasant, for though the wind still howled high overhead and tore in shreds the mists that wreathed the mountain summits, not a breath came to ruffle the stillness of their shelter.

John, his first curiosity and delight gratified, be-thought him of his companions. Rose still slumbered peacefully, but Bill was gone. It was evident that he had fallen a victim to the waves from which they had been so miraculously saved, and John was almost ashamed to acknowledge even to himself the joy with which he realized his release from his remorseless pursuer whose sole aim was to preserve him for the gallows.

Taking the oars, without disturbing Rose, he gently paddled the boat to the shore at a place where the branches of a tree, drooping down to the very surface, formed a natural screen to shut them out from observation, a precaution he thought it wise to take,

since he did not know whether the place was inhabited or not.

He had scarcely secured the boat when Rose awoke, with a cry of astonishment at her changed surroundings. He related as briefly as he could the events of the past night, not omitting the presumed death of Bill, and unwillingly pretended to share her regrets at his loss. He could not tell her what a relief it was to him.

After they had taken a hasty meal from the sodden food that still remained, they started to find some shelter, for it was impossible to foresee how long they might have to stay.

It cut John to the heart to see how much the past week's sufferings had affected Rose. That she should be pale and thin was to be expected, but she was so pitifully weak that it was only by clinging to his arm that she could walk at all, and even then she had incessantly to beg him to stop that she might rest awhile. At length he persuaded her to repose beneath the shade of a far-spreading tree, while he pursued the exploration alone.

He was not long in finding the very thing he wanted. In the foot of the cliff, close by a place where a rivulet, falling in a single stream from the rocks overhead, wandered through a grassy lawn shut in on all sides by trees, he found a cave floored with soft dry sand. This he resolved should be Rose's lodging; and there she dwelt during their entire sojourn, while he built for himself a rough hut of boughs in which he could sleep, keeping guard at the same time over the entrance.

And now for the first time he reaped some small

advantage from the loss of his former conveniences. Disgusted at the cumbrous slowness of the arquebuse, after the quick precision of modern fire-arms, he had devoted himself to acquiring the art of shooting with a bow, which served him well now in providing for their food. The flint and steel, which he had been compelled to adopt instead of the simplicity of a box of matches, and with which to say the truth he had at first cut and bruised his fingers most abominably, now stood him in good stead, and supplied him with the means of making a fire which would have been altogether lacking to him in his former life.

For more than three weeks Rose continued so ill, and mended so slowly that, anxious as he was to explore as far as possible this unknown country, John did not like to leave her. She had at first a mortal dread of being left alone, while she was far too weak to accompany him. But at the end of that time, as they had neither seen nor heard anything to make them think that there were other human beings near, she consented to his absence for one day.

He took advantage of it to make his way to the summit of the mountain above them. Starting early in the morning, he ascended to the valley that rose to the north, through dense underwood in which, even at that hour, the atmosphere was that of a vapor bath. Emerging from this at length, he found himself on a broad stretch of turf which sloped rapidly up to where the shoulder of the mountain towered cliff upon cliff up into the sky. He saw that on that side an ascent was impracticable, but hoped to find a more possible path on the other side. As he strode

swiftly over the springy turf, he perceived at some distance a deer which seemed to proceed with difficulty, limping strangely along, drawing both its hind legs under it at the same time, and then advancing with an ungainly leap. Waiting until it was sufficiently near, he brought it down with a well-aimed arrow, and, on approaching, found, to his extreme surprise and consternation, the cause of its extraordinary movements. Both its hind legs were transfixed by an arrow !

This discovery filled him with fear. There were then other inhabitants somewhere in the neighborhood, savage ones moreover, judging by the arrow, which was of the rudest and simplest workmanship. He was doubtful whether to go on or return. Both seemed fraught with danger, but he resolved finally to continue his journey, as from the vantage point which the mountain top would give him, he might be able to discover the whereabouts of these unwelcome denizens.

He found the other side of the mountain steep, but not particularly difficult ; it was indeed in general shape a cone, half of which had been removed as if by a perpendicular cut through the apex ; and scrambling up the sloping sides he eventually attained the summit.

The first glance showed him that they were on an island. All round, the sea stretched away to the horizon, which seemed to rise above him, giving him the singular sensation of standing in the centre of a circular bowl, and looking up and not down at the surrounding scene.

The island was roughly circular in shape, two-thirds of it covered with a crescent of forest, a mass of unbroken foliage beneath him, nearly in the centre of which glimmered the land-locked bay, besides which lay his dwelling-place. The rest of the land sloped away behind him to the water's edge in long rolling downs, pierced here and there by minor peaks of rock.

But not a sound from the forest, not a smoke wreath rising into the air, threw any light on the origin of the mysterious arrow, and in considerable trepidation he took his way homewards.

He arrived safely without further adventures, having removed on his downward path such portions as he needed of the deer, which still lay untouched where he had left it. He was warmly welcomed by Rose to whom he had resolved to say nothing of his startling discovery, judging that it would certainly alarm her and would serve no purpose. He took care, however, for the future to find some excuse for always extinguishing their fire before night fell.

A whole week passed without bringing relief to John's anxiety, or confirming his worst fears.

Once indeed, when on the slopes below the shoulder of the mountain, whither he went almost daily to reconnoitre, he thought he perceived at a distance, a faint blue smoke rising from the forest, but a close and careful search in that direction revealed nothing to account for it.

In the course of the next week he made as thorough an examination, as circumstances permitted, of the surrounding forest, but found nothing to indicate the

presence of mankind, and was forced to conclude that the intruders had removed to some distant part of the island, or had departed by sea for their homes.

At the end of that time the tranquillity which, in spite of the slowness of Rose's recovery, had begun to settle on John's spirit was rudely dispelled.

It was November the fifth, though nothing in that delightful climate of eternal summer betrayed the fact, when, having seen Rose comfortably disposed in the shade near the cave, he started to explore partially the portion of the island which he had not yet visited.

The keen fresh air on the higher slopes exhilarated him, and it was with a joyful heart and a light gait that he turned the shoulder of the mountain, but he had no sooner glanced at the encircling ocean than he stopped short, and the song he was singing in the freedom of his spirits died away unfinished.

Below him, beyond the rolling downs, a ship lay at anchor about three-quarters of a mile from the shore.

Repressing his first impulse to raise a shout, or give some other token of his presence, he concluded to first obtain, if possible, some more certain knowledge of the visitor. He had not forgotten that the *White Lily* was still probably somewhere in these seas, and having once escaped he was not desirous of rushing once more into the power of Travers and his rascally minions.

Advancing cautiously, he gradually approached the shore. After a time a sound like the distant murmur of voices, the clash of metal, and the rattle

of falling stones broke louder and more loud upon his straining ear. The further he proceeded the more distinct and unmistakable it became.

Suddenly he stopped and flung himself at full length on the turf. After a period of intense, eager attention, he slowly and carefully crawled forward a few paces, and stopped again, still stretched upon the sward.

Beneath him the ground fell suddenly in a precipitous cliff, bordering a narrow, stony ravine, which seemed at times to carry the water from the upper declivities of the mountain to the sea. It was bounded on the opposite side by similar bluffs of less height, beyond which the downs rolled onwards as before.

It was not, however, the scene, but what was passing there that attracted his attention.

Some way up the valley, beneath the shade of a lofty tree which flourished, strangely enough in that barren spot, stood a group of three men. Their voices fell clear and thin upon his ear, but the distance was too great for him to distinguish what they said, nor, for the same reason, could he make out their features, but their occupation was unmistakable. Two of them were engaged in filling up a pit, into which, at the moment when John became an unbidden spectator, they had succeeded with some difficulty in lowering an evidently heavy chest.

The actions of the third, who appeared to be in authority, were of a less comprehensible nature. He cast, ever and anon, an anxious glance around him, and appeared, from his irresolution, to be meditating

some deed which he either feared, or was unwilling to perform.

John was not left long in doubt as to what this hesitation meant. As the two men bent over the pit, which was already half refilled, he swiftly drew a cutlass from beneath his cloak and, leaping like a cat upon the one whose back was turned to him, with one stroke cut him to the ground. The poor wretch fell writhing head-foremost into the pit, from which the other sprang with a cry of rage and horror which rang shrilly in John's ears. He attempted to seize a weapon, but his assailant was too quick for him; clearing the space between them at a bound, he stood beside the miserable man, who seeing that flight and resistance were alike hopeless, fell grovelling upon his knees. For some time they remained thus, the one manifestly pleading hard for life, the other listening motionless.

Then he raised his sword, and coolly ran the unfortunate being through the body.

A sick horror possessed John at the sight of this cold-blooded cruelty; the place swam before his eyes, and for a time he saw no more.

When he recovered the man was engaged with the same cool deliberation in destroying all signs of the excavation by heaping rocks and stones upon the disturbed spot. The bodies of his two victims had disappeared, being presumably interred together with what he did not doubt was the treasure they had helped to conceal.

Having completed his arrangements to his apparent satisfaction, and having taken certain bearings, to

assist him, probably, in identifying the spot in the future, he advanced down the gulch with the evident intention of rejoining the ship.

As he passed almost beneath John, who was contemplating the advisability of hurling a rock down to crush the assassin, he looked upwards at the sky.

It was more with horror than surprise that John found himself once more face to face with Richard Travers, who after a casual glance at the unclouded firmament, resumed his downward path.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LAST OF THE WHITE LILY.

JOHN, doubtful whether he had been seen or not, scarcely dared to breathe until the last sound of Travers' footsteps, as he stumbled over the stony river bed, had died away ; but when no further echo rang faintly from the opposite cliffs, disturbing the hot silence, he leaped to his feet, and rapidly retraced his steps.

He was haunted by a vague premonition of coming danger, and, though he fully believed that he had escaped observation, it was an unbounded relief to him, on turning at the feet of the mountain, to see that the White Lily was already preparing to sail. He waited until the anchor was apeak, and the great mainsail hoisted, and then started once more on his homeward path.

He had lingered so long that darkness came, with that strange tropical suddenness, before he reached the head of the valley which led down to the bay, and he had to continue his journey slowly, and with precaution, for the way was difficult even by daylight.

He had not proceeded far before he became aware of a faint glow glimmering through the trees, which he was convinced after a time could only proceed from a fire some way above him on the right, and eager as he was to rejoin Rose, who must by that time be getting anxious at his long absence, he felt it his paramount duty to approach with all possible care, and discover who was encamped in such dangerous proximity to the cave.

With all the silence and cunning of an Indian he advanced until, through an intervening brake of rustling bamboos, he could see, close at hand, the fire burning brightly. It was placed in the centre of a small rocky plateau, and threw a clear light upon the ground around it, and the overhanging cliff, but not a living creature was to be seen. It appeared to be entirely deserted. This mysterious solitude was more alarming than a whole army of painted savages. What was the meaning of this lonely beacon? Was it a signal, or had its makers heard his approach, in spite of his circumspection, and betaken themselves to ambush?

He did not dare to progress any further, and withdrew in the same manner in which he had drawn near, his nerves tingling painfully with the instant apprehension of a spear-thrust in his back, but after

a period, that seemed to him an age, he issued unharmed upon the path he had quitted.

As he stayed a moment to rest, still pondering on the meaning of what he had seen, suddenly, above the pervading hum of the myriad insects that filled the air with murmur, above the harsh chorus of the frogs, above the dismal howling of the owls, and the strange cries of unknown night birds, a shrill faint scream, piercing the air, rose from the valley far below him.

It was Rose, and in danger of some kind !

Regardless of the roughness of the path, reckless of the surrounding savages, heedless of the unseen perils that encompassed him, he dashed headlong down the ravine slipping, sliding, falling, rising and pushing on once more, he at length reached the level ground encircling the bay, bruised and breathless, but uninjured.

Without an instant's pause he flew to the cave where he had left Rose, to find his worst fears realized. She had vanished !

He called aloud and there was no answer ; but, when the rolling echoes of his voice had died away, as he listened eagerly for some response, he heard from far across the water the rattle of oars in the rowlocks. A few hasty strides showed him that his ears had not deceived him,—the boat was gone.

Exhausted as he was, he did not delay a moment. Whoever had carried off Rose obviously knew of the entrance to the bay, and was making for it. It was narrow and, if he could but arrive in time, he might yet rescue her. As he sped along the level shore the

increasing noise of the oars proved to him that the oarsman was in fact holding his course for the opening and he soon found that he had outstripped them, and should get there first. He should save her after all.

He was already arranging in his mind how he would lie concealed until the boat was passing him, and then, with one spring, throw himself on board, when he found his further progress blocked.

The lawn he was traversing had been rapidly narrowing, and now ceased altogether. Rising perpendicularly from the water's edge a mighty precipice barred the way. In an agony of despair he paced the narrow beach. Advance was impossible, and in impotent fury he heard the boat draw nearer and nearer, pass him, and go onwards. He shouted once more, but still there was no answer. A startled bird fell from the cliff above and broke the silence with clatter of wings, but that was all. He cursed and swore at the unknown, but the only reply was a peal of mocking laughter, which rang hollow from the narrow cleft into which the boat entered at the moment.

Heartbroken and hopeless he crept back to the cave, now reft of its beloved inmate, and after many a weary hour forgot his troubles, for a time, in sleep.

All the next day he paced up and down in a state of helpless rebellion against the evil fate which had, a second time, and in as mysterious a fashion, torn Rose from his side. He thought neither of rest nor refreshment. He did not even wonder by whom she had been stolen from him. Back and forth he wildly strode, until the grass withered beneath his tramp-

ling feet; one idea only in his mind; Rose—Rose was gone, lost to him, possibly forever.

It was late before he sought the shelter of the cave, which he was now determined to occupy for the future, and he shed many a tear, and heaved many a heartfelt sigh before he fell asleep.

He awoke presently with a sudden start, having the sensation of a flash of light in his eyes. All was profoundly dark. But what was that murmuring and rustling outside?

Holding his breath, and pressing his hand upon his beating heart he listened intently. There were people moving near at hand, and whispering together. Who were they, and what did they want with him? Sparks as of fire swam before his straining eyes, as he sat motionless and breathless. The suspense was agony, and he was about to rush forth in sheer desperation and learn the worst, when a glare of light burst upon him, dazzling him utterly. At the same moment, three or four men dashed into the cave, and quickly seized and bound him. In silence he submitted, and was borne to the boat which lay near at hand. It was needless to ask questions. He recognized his assailants, and knew that he had again fallen into the hands of his evil genius. For himself he had no fear or care, his only anxiety was for Rose. He wondered vaguely how Travers had discovered his place of concealment, and the explanation which he subsequently obtained may be briefly given here.

Wringley, when he had been swept from the boat, had not been drowned, as John had assumed, but had got ashore on the opposite side of the bay. He

had made his way up the valley that opened from it, and, ignorant of the fact that his companions had also escaped, had supported himself on the game he killed with a rude bow and arrows which he constructed. He had seen the ship off the island and, having failed to attract the attention of its occupants, had returned to the bay to find some means of escape if possible.

He had discovered the boat, and was about to depart in it, when he was interrupted by Rose. Fearing that her cries would bring John, upon whom she called, to the rescue, he had overpowered and gagged her, and taken her with him in idle spite.

The White Lily, owing to lack of a breeze, had made but little headway, and he easily attracted attention. When he had been taken on board, he had informed Travers of John's situation, and had guided the party who had effected the recapture.

So far Travers related the facts clearly and succinctly, accounting to John for the various appearances on the island that had disturbed him so much, but when he made inquiries as to Rose, he was met with an affectation of indifference that baffled all investigation. That she was safe on board, was all that he could learn.

If Travers maintained an invincible silence on the subject it was more than the crew did, who, as the weeks passed away, advanced by degrees from suppressed grumblings to open murmurs. It was contrary, they said, to all the rules of the Society, that the captain, instead of drawing lots equally, should keep the girl to himself, and endeavor to ingratiate

himself with her, an attempt which, as far as John could gather, met with but very scant success.

The hardships he had undergone in the past months had not been endured with impunity, and were not without their effect on Sir Walter's already sickly constitution. Sufferings, which John in his former life could scarcely have gone through without some after result, affected only too easily his present wasted form, and he was for some weeks prostrated by a fever from which he escaped worn and exhausted, mainly through the attentions of Wringley.

It was the end of December before he was once more able to crawl on deck, still miserably weak, to find that the crew were on the verge of open mutiny. Travers, rebuffed in his suit to Rose, had betaken himself to drinking heavily, to which habit he had always possessed no inconsiderable tendency, and in the madness of intoxication his cruelties and exactions became unendurable.

On Christmas day, as John was seated in his cabin recalling, dismally enough, many pleasant memories of merry Christmases past in his old lost life, and contrasting them bitterly with his present situation, he was aroused from his reverie by a shot and a cry of agony. As there had been none of the usual preparations for attack, he concluded that the long smouldering rebellion had at last burst forth.

Rushing from his cabin, he made his way hastily to the upper deck, not that he had any intention of interfering on either side, but because he knew that his own fate was intimately connected with that of Travers.

That he had rightly guessed the cause of the disturbance was clear at the first glance.

Opposite him, in the doorway connecting the fortified forecastle with the waist of the ship, stood Travers alone, his eyes flashing with rage. Below John, with their backs to him, stood the crew in a semicircle, while between the two groups lay the still quivering body of a man, with a ghastly hole in his forehead from which the blood trickled slowly to the deck.

The mutineers seemed doubtful how to proceed, for while Travers had still several pistols in his belt, they were only armed with boarding pikes or cutlasses. So quickly had John gained the deck that the discharged pistol was still smoking in Travers' hand. Without giving the perplexed crew time to recover he now grasped it by the barrel and with a yell of fury flung it among the men, catching one of them so shrewd a blow on the temple that he dropped lifeless to the deck, while he instantly drew another from his belt. At the same moment a boarding pike flew from the hand of one of the men, and barely missing Travers, who sprang hastily on one side to avoid it, stuck trembling in the door-post by his side.

Another shot answered this attack, and the man Knocknaile, flinging his arms into the air fell heavily on his face with a gurgling cry. With a shriek of fury the entire body of men rushed forward, but Travers quickly withdrew into the doorway which was too narrow to admit more than one man at a time.

In their efforts to advance they only incommoded one another, and as two shots in quick succession rang through the ship, and a cloud of smoke poured from the entrance, they surged back in confusion, leaving two more of their number on the ground. One of these was already dead; but the other, though severely wounded, endeavored to crawl back to his comrades. Travers observing this, as he reappeared in the open, while still covering the rebels with a pistol in one hand, wrenched the pike from the wall beside him, and with a laugh of exultation pinned the writhing creature to the deck.

A pause now ensued in the hostilities, the men fearing to advance, and Travers evidently anxious to reserve his fire, as he had now but two pistols left, and it was impossible for him to reload them when once discharged.

Suddenly he came forward a step or two, and as the men drew back, shot one who was endeavoring to persuade them to charge, then turning he fled back into the doorway, flung the door to, and securely barred it, before the astonished men could reach it.

In another instant he appeared on the roof of the forecastle, his only remaining pistol still in his hand.

With a shout of vengeance the men rushed forward, some battering furiously at the door, others attempting to clamber up the bulkhead, while still others hurried to fetch a ladder which they placed against it. Already the door was yielding to the repeated blows, already a man had his foot on the lowest rung of the ladder, when Travers with a quick movement opened a trapdoor at his feet, and shouted in a voice

of thunder rising clear above the yells and execrations of the men :

“Back miscreants, back ! Advance but a step and I fire ! Ye think I have but one shot left. Stir but a finger and that shot shall blow the ship, and all of ye to perdition. Ye know me of old. My word is my deed. One step and I fire the magazine.”

The scene, though he saw it but for a moment, was photographed on John's mind, never to be effaced as long as he lived. Travers, erect and defiant, the pistol pointing to the dark opening at his feet, the men silent and motionless each fixed in the attitude he had been in when Travers spoke. One moment, and then a scream from beneath brought John at one bound to the side of the ship. A glance showed him a boat full of men, already at some distance from the ship, and struggling in their midst, a figure which he knew must be Rose.

The next instant the cool green water was roaring in his ears as, leaping from the deck, he plunged beneath the surface. As he rose he felt the sea around him shaken with a mighty throb, and above the rushing of the water he heard a dull muffled explosion.

As his head emerged from the waves he saw the air checkered with flying fragments showering down, and a large mass of timber falling with a resounding splash within a few feet of him reminded him of his danger.

He immediately dived again, remaining under water until he could bear it no longer. When he had dashed the brine from his eyes, and recovered his breath he perceived that he was alone. The gentle undula-

tions of the sea were covered far and wide with floating wreckage, which rose and fell softly around him, but the White Lily was gone.

The boat he had previously seen was now at some considerable distance, but he hailed her wildly on the chance of being heard. He saw one man whom he believed to be Wringley, endeavor to turn her head in his direction, but in spite of his evident expostulations, the others prevented him effecting his purpose, and before long she dwindled to a mere speck and disappeared in the offing.

John, in the meantime, had not been idle. Selecting from the numerous pieces of timber in his neighborhood, one which, while sufficiently large to support him, was not too heavy, he started swimming in the direction which the boat had taken, pushing it before him.

It was hard work, but without it he must shortly have perished from exhaustion, whereas now, when he was too tired to proceed, he could lash himself to the beam and remain safely afloat until he had somewhat recovered his strength. His progress was inevitably slow; but that he did advance, however slightly, was obvious from the fact that he gradually left behind him all traces of the catastrophe.

He did not wait to discover whether there were any other survivors. He neither knew nor cared. It was improbable, almost impossible; and even in his nearly hopeless situation he cheered his flagging spirits with the thought that now, at all events, he must have got rid forever of the ill-omened man in yellow.

All that afternoon he struggled bravely on, taking longer and longer intervals of rest, until, as the moon rose above the horizon, he realized that all further effort was impossible, and, tying himself securely to the beam, committed himself to the mercy of the waves. Lulled by their gentle motion, he fell presently into troubled sleep, and did not wake until the sky was red with the dawn.

He would have resumed his former method of progress, but worn with his previous exertions, exhausted by hunger and thirst, and stiff from the prolonged immersion, he found that it was impossible. The sun was not high before, utterly overcome, he lost all consciousness.

When he recovered he found himself once more in a berth on shipboard.

"What day is it?" he asked, wearily, of a man who stood beside him.

"The thirty-first of December," was the answer. It was the anniversary of his fatal success.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CHAIN IS BROKEN.

THE exposure, coming after the illness induced by his previous sufferings, physical and mental, brought on a severe relapse, and during the entire voyage John lay seriously ill.

He understood, vaguely, that he had been discov-

ered, well-nigh dead, and taken on board a vessel homeward bound from the Azores; but he did not inquire what ship it was, or in what part of the ocean he had been picked up. Life was to him little more than a troubled dream, in which his real self and former existence became more and more inextricably mingled with his present miserable condition. Encouraged by the apparent fact that the exhausted state of Sir Walter's body had weakened the ties that bound him to it, he endeavored at all hazards to break them altogether, and if he could not return to his old life, at least to shake off the troubles and difficulties that surrounded him. His attempt, however, was unsuccessful; there was still some link that held him back. Was it possible that Travers was still alive?

Owing to head winds, it was not until the third of February that the vessel reached her destination, and John crawled feebly on deck.

"Why, what place is this?" he exclaimed, in astonishment, to the captain, who accompanied him and who had offered to put him on shore, having firmly refused to accept any portion of John's scanty stock of money in return for his kindness and care.

"Port of London," said the worthy fellow. "Come, sir, the boat awaits your pleasure. God be with you, and farewell," and with a hearty grasp of his honest hand he turned to his duty, leaving John to clamber painfully down the ship's side.

London! Yes, it was London; but how strangely altered. Even in his dizzy, wondering state of mind he could not fail to notice it.

The sky was blue and smokeless ; the sun sparkled, undimmed by fog, upon the river, which flowed clear and bright. The Tower, although possessing various buildings now swept away, was easily recognizable, but all else was different. That strange structure, Old London Bridge, spanned the river, with, at low tide, its line of foaming falls ; instead of the looming dome that crowned the city, the lofty tower of old St. Paul's rose clear into the air ; instead of slimy wharves, the banks were lined with fair gardens and stately mansions. It was London without a doubt ; but a strange new London such as he had never known.

All this he saw on his way to the shore without any emotion of surprise. He was past receiving much impression from external objects. It was without astonishment that he found the street, which he crept wearily into from the riverside, full of armed men, hurrying to and fro in wild excitement, raising, ever and anon, loud cries of "No popery ! No Spanish marriage !"

His chief desire was to find some quiet and retired tavern where he could lie down and rest. He wished for obscurity for he realized, with scarcely more than indifference, that Sir Walter must have had many enemies, creditors, perhaps even officers of the law in search of him, by any of whom he would be instantly recognized, while all alike were unknown to him.

He was about to seek shelter from the thronged main street, in a by lane, when he perceived a richly dressed gentleman in his path who, stopping with a start of surprise, held out his hand, exclaiming:

“Sir Walter! By’r lady, I hardly knew you. You are sadly changed. But come, come with me—we have work in hand after your own heart—we will smoke the popish fox.” And raising the cry “No popery!” which a score of throats re-echoed, he seized John’s arm, and dragged him along with him, too weary, too careless to resist.

They reached in time a large handsome house, which seemed at the moment a very pandemonium. The doors were broken in, the casements smashed to atoms, and the house filled with a mob of shouting, yelling men, who were employed in wrecking everything within reach, tearing down the hangings, hacking the carved work with swords and axes, and committing every extravagance of destruction imaginable. But in the library, to which his new friend dragged him as to the very centre and summit of amusement, Bedlam seemed to have broken loose. The books were snatched from the shelves, torn into countless fragments, and flung upon the floor. The air was filled with fluttering sheets of paper, the ground was strewn knee deep with rustling leaves, and still the hubbub and commotion grew.

As John, standing listlessly in the doorway, gazed with half-seeing eyes upon this extraordinary scene, a cry of fire was raised. Some one had mischievously set a torch to the waste of litter, and as there was a brisk breeze blowing through the shattered windows the place quickly became a sea of flame. At this moment he fancied he perceived among the throng of maddened beings fighting to reach the door, a man resembling Travers, but he was himself swept away

by the first rush of escaping men, and when he paused outside unable to proceed further, the shrieks and yells of agony, together with the clouds of smoke and tongues of flame that poured from inside convinced him that, if he had not been mistaken, as was probably the case, there was but little chance of his enemy surviving.

He had become separated from his unknown friend in the stampede, and glad to be relieved of his unwelcome companionship, he moved away, intending to cross the bridge. To his surprise he found that it was strongly barricaded, and a battery of guns blocked the shore end. Foiled in his intentions he sought an inn, and with difficulty obtained the shelter of which he stood so much in need.

For two days he lay helpless, and heedless of all that passed without, but at the end of that time a new and stranger circumstance partially aroused him. The thunder of cannon, the crash of falling roofs and chimney-stacks, the shrieks of the terrified populace broke upon his wondering ears.

It is probable that he would have continued to listen, without any thought of moving from so dangerous a neighborhood, had not a man rushed suddenly into the room in which he lay, crying:

“Up, up, Sir Walter! Boot and saddle is the word! The good folk here begin to find our company too warm for them. We march at once.”

In spite of his feeble remonstrance he was dragged out, and still with merely a vague surprise found himself on horseback among a numerous body of armed men, marching, whither he neither knew nor

cared. His only wish was to be permitted to lie down and die in peace.

All that afternoon and far into the night they plodded on, every step of his steed racking his aching limbs, his brain whirling, until it was with difficulty that he managed to remain in the saddle. When, at about midnight they halted, he dropped from his horse, rather than dismounted, and would have fallen to the ground had he not been sustained by a strong arm. His assistant led him to a blazing fire that crackled in the open roadway, and fed him with bread and wine.

After a time the roar of guns commenced again, near at hand, but his weakened body could endure no more, and he swooned away.

When he awoke he was lying in bed in a strange room, and a pleasant matronly-looking body was seated at work by the fire which murmured cheerfully upon the hearth.

"Where am I?" he moaned feebly.

The woman rose at the sound of his voice and came towards him.

"Where? Why, marry, here in Kingston," she said.

"Kingston!" he repeated in amazement. "How on earth did I get here?"

"Hush, hush!" she said, in a curiously mysterious tone. "I know not, and you have forgotten."

"But how?" he asked again in irritation.

She evaded the question as before, and all through the ensuing week, during which she nursed and tended him carefully. Whenever he returned to the

topic she refused with the same mysterious air to answer him, evidently assuming that they had a common knowledge of a matter which it was unwise to mention. An assumption which, so far as John was concerned, was entirely unfounded.

“How long have I been here?” he asked once.

“Let me see,” she answered, pondering, “’Tis, methinks, five weeks since—since you came here.”

“And you have nursed me all that time?” he exclaimed.

“Ay,” she replied. “And would thrice as long for the sake of—of the good cause.” And with a nod full of secret significance, she left the room.

John had so far recovered by this time that these hints and hidden meanings puzzled and annoyed him extremely, but she obstinately refused to speak more plainly, and clearly thought that he was skilfully playing a necessary and not unamusing part.

He was already considering the expediency of moving further, though in what direction to seek his lost Rose he knew not, when the woman entered his chamber, with scared eyes, and a face pale with apprehension, crying:

“Haste thee, haste thee, you must fly at once. A troop of horse and officers with a search warrant are even now entering the town. I dare not have them find you here.”

“Why, what do you mean?” he said, in amazement.

“Nay, nay,” she answered, wringing her hands in terror. “Tarry not; this is no time for idle jesting. Fly, while there is yet time,” and seeing that he still

lingered, she almost forced him from the room, saying in a tone of agonized entreaty :

“ Be gone, man. Is this your gratitude? Would you hang us? ”

Cutting short alike his questions and his thanks, she led him to the back door, and hastily pointing out the road he had best take, shut and locked it upon him. She refused to take any payment for her services, reiterating :

“ Nay, nay. 'Twas for the good cause.”

Whatever this mysterious cause might be, it was sufficiently clear that the woman's fear was not feigned, and that for some misdeed unknown to John, instant flight was essential for the preservation of Sir Walter's life.

The long rest and careful nursing he had enjoyed had considerably improved his bodily condition, though he was still very weak, but to the mental distress occasioned by the loss of Rose, was now added a constant apprehension concerning his own danger. He felt that he was at all times surrounded by unseen imminent perils. It would have been some relief had he been in a position to recognize it when face to face with it, but in his ignorance, he might at any moment walk unconsciously into the very jaws of danger, perhaps even death.

It was to a certain extent a comfort to him, after this constant haunting dread of the unknown, to find himself at length in actual opposition to a known and recognizable enemy.

On the tenth of April, having after the usual day's wandering, found shelter in a roadside tavern, he was

seated by the fire during the preparation of his supper, when the door opened and a man entered with a rattle and clash that showed that he was armed. John moved slightly to one side to make room for the new-comer, and would have continued his reflections without further observation, if he had not been recalled to himself by an exclamation from the stranger :

“ Ah ! ” he cried in a tone of sarcastic satisfaction. “ Well met, Sir Walter Carlingford.”

John started to his feet in some alarm, and saw standing before him, in a threatening attitude, William Merrill, the brother of the ill-used Mary.

“ You here ? ” he cried.

“ Better late than never,” was the reply. “ You escaped me once before. It is my turn now. I have bided my time, but now we do not part until I have chastised your cowardice and treachery.”

“ Stop a moment,” said John. “ Let me explain.”

“ Draw, and defend yourself ! ” shouted the other. “ No explanation will suffice. My deserted sister calls for vengeance.”

As he spoke he lunged at John with such determination that he had no choice but to put himself in an attitude of defence.

For some seconds they stood silently on guard, the flashing point of his opponent’s weapon dazzling John’s eyes, while the scrape of the steel grated harshly on his nerves. Suddenly with the quickness of lightning, Merrill sprang forward. John, he knew not how, parried the thrust, but before he could recover he felt a slight sting in his left shoulder, and

knew that he was wounded. Maddened by the pain, he in his turn attacked so furiously that Merrill, in spite of his superior science, had much ado to defend himself; but John was weak and ill, and it became evident to him that before long the combat must have a fatal ending for himself. Already, more than once his adversary's sword had been in close proximity to his breast. He had already given himself up for lost, when the door was flung violently open, and a man in black, followed by four soldiers, rushed into the room.

"Strike up the weapons," cried the former, "disarm, and secure them!"

In a moment to John's no small satisfaction, their swords were snatched from them, and their arms bound behind their backs.

"What means this intrusion, knave?" asked Merrill haughtily.

"I arrest you, William Merrill" answered the man, "for unlawfully conspiring against the crown and peace of Her Gracious Majesty the Queen, whom God preserve."

Merrill shrugged his shoulders, and turning to John said in an accent of the bitterest contempt:

"Is this your doing, Sir Walter Carlingford?"

John was about to protest his innocence of any complicity, when the officer with an expression of joy, exclaimed:

"Sir Walter Carlingford! This is right good fortune. I have sought you far and wide. I arrest you for the same cause, in that you were an aider and abettor at the sack of Winchester Place. Bring them away."

In spite of John's remonstrances, and protestations, he was dragged from the room, and mounted behind one of the soldiers, to whose belt he was securely attached, and Merrill being similarly accommodated, the whole troop set out for London.

John had wandered further than he thought, for it took them three days' hard riding to reach their destination, during which the two prisoners, though carefully guarded, were treated with all possible consideration.

As they passed through the streets on their way to the Tower, they encountered more than once, a sight ghastly enough to make the stoutest shudder. Wherever there was space enough, stood a gallows on which hung in rows the bodies of the unfortunate insurgents, of whom John had so unconsciously been one.

His escort pointed them out to him with a grin, plainly intimating that their fate would also be his.

On their arrival they were taken into a guard-room, where a venerable-looking old man noted down their names and qualities.

This being done, he carefully consulted a list which lay on the table before him.

"Merrill," he said at length, "must remain here for the question; he is deeply implicated. Dispose of Sir Walter as you may; there is no room here."

An application at Newgate met with the same reply, and after a brief consultation the party moved on once more.

It was now dark, and John was unable to distinguish his surroundings, when he was told roughly to dismount. A heavy door was unlocked and opened,

he was thrust forward, and the door was fastened behind him.

The place was absolutely dark, and stepping cautiously forward he heard the rustle of straw beneath his feet. Another step, and he stumbled over a soft object which a muttered curse showed him to be a man. He felt around with his outstretched hands, but could find nothing within reach, and stepping forward once again he trod full upon another man, who sprang up with an oath, and hurled him away. He tripped over another as he staggered back, and falling full length on the floor, determined to remain where he was until dawn should enlighten him as to his whereabouts.

An occasional rustling of the straw, and the sounds of heavy breathing around him told him that he had many companions in misfortune, and that fact afforded food for cogitation until he fell asleep.

As, scarcely awake, he opened his eyes the next morning, he was astounded to see above him a column rising gracefully upwards until far overhead it spread out into arching groins supporting a richly carved and gilded roof, below which was a row of lofty windows, and lower still an intricately carved gallery. Sitting up, thoroughly aroused by the strangeness of his surroundings, he saw, stretching to right and left, behind and opposite him rows of similar columns, and he perceived that he was in a church. The pavement was covered with straw, and on it in various attitudes of repose or wakefulness, lay fifty or sixty men, doubtless prisoners like himself.

Here he remained, in doubt as to his fate, for nearly

three weeks. His companions seemed little affected by their situation, and as wine and food were easily procurable by those who could pay for it, they passed their time for the most part in reckless carousal. John was too ill in body and distressed in mind to join them, though repeatedly invited to do so; and as, much to his relief, none of them had known Sir Walter, he was left very much to his own gloomy thoughts.

Occasionally a new comer was unceremoniously thrust among them; oftener one or another was taken away never to return; but this circumstance seemed scarcely to affect them, and after the first expressions of sympathy by the intimates of the departed man, they betook themselves once more to songs and drinking bouts.

Time passed, and the expected summons for John came not, until at last he almost longed to receive it, so weary was he of this life.

On the third of May, however, an event occurred which roused him from his apathy. As he was sitting apart in melancholy solitude, the great door was flung open, and a man, accompanied by a dozen pikemen, entered the church.

John, on beholding him, leaped to his feet, and stood leaning pale and breathless against a column, staring in fixed wonder at the new arrival. Was he never to be free of his tormentor?

His countenance was seamed and scarred, and he halted in his gait, but there was no mistaking that face and figure. In spite of the various marks that showed he had not come off scathless, John saw at

once that Richard Travers had, by some miracle, escaped from the destruction of the White Lily, and stood before him. Was he also a prisoner?

This matter was not left long in doubt; stepping cat-like among the groups of men, with the same, well-known, evil smile upon his face, he lightly touched the shoulder of a man who was uproariously trolling the burden of some bacchanalian song. He looked up in surprise, but he was instantly seized by two of the soldiers, a rope was flung round his neck, and he was led away, his reckless gayety exchanged for piteous apprehension.

Wandering here and there among the wretched prisoners, who shrank from his approach, he touched one man after another, until eight had been led out with the fatal halter round their necks, amidst growing murmurs from the remainder.

“Spy! Traitor! Informer!” louder and louder rose the cries, while Travers, still smiling odiously, continued his treacherous work.

With a sinking heart John saw him slowly approach, with no look of recognition in his eyes. Nearer and nearer he came, making straight for him, with hand outstretched, delaying as if with the purpose of prolonging the agony; the fatal touch already hung dallying above him, when suddenly from the far end of the place a clear voice rose above the hubbub, crying aloud:

“Down with him! Down with the traitor!”

Travers started and turned pale. He seemed to comprehend all at once the danger of his position. He had not apparently realized before, though count

less watchful eyes around him had noted it, that every wretch sent to his doom reduced his guard, until now there were but four left. In an instant these were seized and held securely, while another body rushed to prevent the door being opened from outside. No violence was offered to the men, who were merely hindered by main force from interfering, or summoning assistance.

Travers, his eyes glaring with rage and terror, drew his sword, and placing his back against a pillar, prepared to defend himself.

But what was one puny blade against that rabble of maddened men?

With a yell of fury they rushed down on him like wolves. He passed his sword through the body of the first, but before he could withdraw it the rest were upon him. He was clutched by a hundred hands, and dragged struggling into the centre of the church, his shrieks of pain and terror drowned in the yells of exultation. In an instant he was hidden from sight in the throng, each striving to get near him. Shriek after shriek rang echoing along the vaulted roof, as countless hands clutched and tore at the wretched creature. John, much as he had reason to hate the man, sickened at the sight, and closed his eyes and stopped his ears to shut it out.

Presently the crowd surged back, and each man, who had but now both looked and acted like a fiend, sank unconcernedly upon the straw; the soldiers were released, and pale and trembling, left the place with faltering steps.

Splashes and flecks of blood here and there upon

the ground, still quivering fragments of flesh and bone scattered far and wide, were all that remained of Richard Travers.

He had been literally torn to pieces by the men he had betrayed.

CHAPTER XX.

IN SAFETY.

A WEEK after Travers had met his tragic ending, as the warder, whose duty it was to distribute their rations to the prisoners, gave John his allowance, he said to him in a hurried whisper :

“Lie to-night as near the vestry door as may be. Do not sleep for your life, and make no sound whatever happens.”

There was no time to ask for explanations, as the man at once moved on ; so John, in a state of wondering confusion, followed his instructions implicitly. About midnight, when the regular breathing of his companions betokened that they were all asleep, he heard a gentle rustling in the straw beside him, and felt a hand laid softly on his breast.

“Rise and follow me,” murmured a voice in his ear, which he recognized as the warder’s. “Above all be silent !”

He obeyed, stepping cautiously over the straw, until his conductor said in a less suppressed tone :
“Stop.”

He halted in utter darkness, while the door through which they had apparently passed was softly closed, and secured behind him. A curtain was drawn across it, and then the man, casting off his caution, struck a light, and John perceived that he was in a fair-sized room, which was ordinarily used as the vestry of the church in which he had been imprisoned.

“There, madam,” said the man cheerily, to a dark-cloaked figure that stood in one corner. “I have done my part faithfully. About yours quickly. There is no time to lose.”

With these words he opened another door which, judging by the gust of cool air which entered, gave upon the outer world.

The figure silently signed to John to proceed, and he did so in considerable amazement. The woman, who stayed for a moment to hold some further conversation with the jailer, in which, as he inferred from the sound, the payment of a sum of money had no unimportant share, followed him shortly, and indicating a by-street which frowned darkly upon them, led him to where two horses were standing ready saddled, in the charge of a servant.

“Mount, and away,” she said in a muffled voice, quickly setting him the example.

As long as they were in the town she repressed all his attempts at conversation ; but when they had attained the open country, and the sky behind them was already bright with coming day, in reply to his oft-repeated questions as to who it was that had done him such signal service, she threw back her head,

and he saw in the gray light of dawn, the face of Mary Merrill!

“You!” he exclaimed, overwhelmed by this proof of devotion and forgiveness on the part of a woman whom he had apparently wronged so bitterly. “Do I owe my life to you?”

She gazed upon him with some apprehension at his impetuosity.

“You do not grudge me that slight satisfaction, do you, Walter?” she said, reproachfully.

“Grudge it you?” cried he, touched almost to tears. “If there is one thing I grudge you it is your noble heart.”

She blushed deeply, but made no answer. As they rode rapidly westward, in answer to his inquiries, she explained how she had come to rescue him, delicately avoiding any reference to the reason why. She had journeyed to London on behalf of her brother—a mission which the mourning she wore showed to have been vain. When about to return in despair to her solitary home in Wickworth, her father being dead, she had heard that Sir Walter was also a prisoner, and had determined, with a woman’s magnanimity, to effect his escape. This was more easily done than she had anticipated. The country was sickened at the persistent persecution of the hopelessly crushed rebels, and the authorities openly winked at the escape of any of the captives who had friends outside rich enough to bribe the easily-persuaded warders.

“Dear lady!” said he. “How can I thank you properly? The wrong you think that I have done you, though God knows I am innocent, clogs my tongue.”

“Oh! speak no more of that,” she said, earnestly. “I have long since learned to forgive, if not to forget it.”

He could find no words to reply, but he warmly pressed the hand she extended to him, and raising it to his lips respectfully kissed it.

“And where are we going?” he asked, after a time.

“I thought—” she answered, somewhat doubtfully—“of my house at Wickworth, if it please you. There will be no pursuit, but ’twere better you should not be seen in public as yet.”

He was horrified for the moment at the notion of going to a place where, for all he knew, a price was set upon his head, and a warrant prepared for his arrest; but he reflected that had the ruffians fulfilled their threat, Mary could not have failed to hear of it, in which case she was scarcely likely to have interested herself in the fate of a supposed murderer.

They entered the well-known town after nightfall on the fourth day, and, passing through without drawing bridle, reached their destination unimpeded.

Here John remained for nearly a month, enjoying such peace as his rapidly failing health, and the ever-present thought of Rose permitted. He had not ventured into the town to make inquiries, and naturally shrank from questioning Mary Merrill on a subject which she, on her part, avoided with womanly tact.

More than once he was on the point of endeavoring to explain to her the extraordinary manner in which he, in his innocence, had become saddled with the

crimes and offences of Sir Walter Carlingford, but he despaired of being able to make her understand, and much against his wishes refrained.

The more he saw of her, the more he admired and respected her. He was treated with the utmost consideration. A suite of apartments and several servants were devoted to his use, and he never saw Mary, unless he himself volunteered to visit her. Seeing the pleasure it gave her, and being anxious to repay, to the best of his ability, the benefits she showered upon him, he went every day to spend some hours in her company.

He felt some scruples at thus partaking of her hospitality under false pretences. He winced when she addressed him as Walter, but she would not hear of his departing, and he consoled himself by the thought that, in his ever-weakening condition, it could not last long.

On several occasions he noticed her watching him with curious, wondering eyes, and at length he asked her the reason.

“I know not,” she answered. “You are so changed. You seem so different. In old times—” she went on, with a sigh—“even when I loved you—no, no; fear not. That is past—even then I could not, somehow, respect you, but now you seem so altered, so good and honest. I have heard of your wicked life, more, I doubt not, than is true, but looking at you now I cannot believe it. I did then, though I could not choose but love you the while, God help me!”

“I am not the same, Miss Merrill,” he answered, her declaration overthrowing the reserve he had forced

himself to keep till then. "I have a strange story to relate. I do not ask you to understand me, I only ask you to believe me. Do not think me mad, for as there is a heaven above us, it is true."

And he told her, as clearly as he could, the history of his strange adventure.

She did not, she could not understand him. She did believe him. It was not long before this faith was put to the test.

It may seem strange that, during all this time, John had made no attempt to escape from his troubles by returning to his former life, but the fact is that since Travers' death he had felt so certain that he could succeed, that the tie that restrained him was broken, that he deferred the effort in the wild hope of seeing Rose once more.

On the third of June, as he was walking in the park that surrounded the house, listening to a merry peal of bells that rang faintly from the town in the distance, three men dressed in black approached him.

"Sir Walter Carlingford?" said the foremost, inquiringly.

John acknowledged that he was generally called so.

"Then, sir," said the man, producing a parchment, "it is my painful duty to arrest you."

"Arrest me!" cried John. "What for?"

"For the wilful murder of Roger Helmsley on Cricnell Common."

John staggered back with a groan of despair. The blow had fallen at last.

"Permit me, at least, to return to my apartments

for a moment," he said, after he had recovered from the first shock.

"I am sorry, sir," was the answer, "but my orders are peremptory. The justices are sitting even now. I have a coach in waiting, and you must e'en come at once."

In a gloom of hopeless despair John accompanied his captors. They respected his position, and not a word was spoken among them on the way.

As they passed the church tower, from which the merry peal still rang out loudly, as if in mockery of his misery, they were forced to halt to give passage to a procession which poured from the church doors. It was a wedding party, and he was so placed that no detail escaped him. The contrast between the careless merriment of those laughing groups, and his own blank, hopeless agony was horrible. The cheery townsfolk chattering gayly, the girls clad in white, strewing flowers on the pathway, passed like a half-seen vision before his eyes, and then a hush of expectancy announced the approach of the bride and bridegroom.

The groom was a withered old man, who would more appropriately have become a funeral. But what a bitter pang of anguish pierced poor John's heart when his gaze fell upon the sad, pale face of the bride. It was Rose—his dearly loved, long lost Rose—now indeed lost to him forever!

He half rose in his seat, but the man beside him pulled him down again. The movement, however, attracted her attention, and for an instant their regards met. An expression of horror sprang into her eyes,

her lips half parted, and with a fearful strangled cry, she sank lifeless to the ground, while at the same moment, the way being clear, the carriage dashed on.

What the proceedings were in which he took so important a part, John knew no more than the dead. Rose, and Rose only, filled his mind with agonizing grief.

He heard, as in a dream, that the evidence was the affidavit of a man named Richard Martlett, who had been lately hanged at Carlisle for highway robbery. He had a vague recollection of the presiding magistrate saying that this was, itself, scarcely convincing, but that he thought it advisable to refer the case to the assizes, which commenced that week. Several questions were put to him, but he did not understand them, and could not answer them, and then, after a banging of doors and grating of bolts, he found himself in the solitude of a prison cell.

He tried to reflect upon his situation but in vain. Rose was lost to him, by what threats or cajolery he knew not, and what did anything matter now?

In this state of aching indifference to his own fate he passed the next week, and from it he roused himself with an effort when he was arraigned before a crowded court, on trial for his life.

The affidavit was read; Mary Merrill was unwillingly compelled to admit that Roger Helmsley had been a frequent and not unwelcome visitor when Sir Walter appeared upon the scene, and that his mysterious murder had followed close upon that event.

Here the case for the prosecution would have

rested, and there seemed a strong conviction that the evidence was altogether insufficient, when a messenger pressing through the crowd handed a note to the counsel.

“My lord!” he said, rising, when he had hastily read it. “There is a man without who is anxious to give his testimony, but, as he is in some sort implicated, he demands the protection of the court, and the promise of a free pardon for himself.”

“He shall have it,” said his lordship, “if his evidence be of sufficient weight to warrant it.”

There was a bustling pause, and then John’s brain reeled, as with a malicious scowl at him, Bill Wringley stepped into the witness box.

Dick’s statement was corroborated in every detail, the damning document was produced, and abundantly identified as being in Sir Walter’s handwriting, and before long John was led back to prison, convicted and condemned to death ; Wringley also being detained until his pardon should be negotiated.

July the first was the date fixed for his execution, and three weeks only remained before that date.

He ceased to notice the lapse of time. Aggravated by his grief, not at his own fate but at the loss of Rose, his illness increased upon him so much that it was doubtful if he would live until the fatal day.

As far as he could judge, it was on the tenth night after his condemnation that he was aroused from sleep by the smell of smoke and the crackle of burning timber. That he was not the only one to observe it was clear from the yells of fear that proceeded from the other prisoners. The smoke increased in

volume, and already the glare of fire shone in the passage without, when his cell door was hastily unlocked, and he was hurried between two jailers into the open space in front of the prison, and there carefully guarded while the work of rescue went on.

The flames spread rapidly, and clouds of sparks flew high into the midnight sky. The roar of the flames, and the shouts of the men vainly flinging buckets of water into the blazing pile, were drowned for the moment by the dull crash of the falling roof, and by a shrill piercing cry of anguish which succeeded.

In the open doorway, which glowed like the mouth of a furnace, a dark figure appeared for a moment against the brilliant background, and then fell headlong down the steps.

His clothes were alight in twenty places, but the flames were quickly beaten out, and he was laid, scorched and blackened, at the feet of John as he stood among the rescued prisoners.

In spite of his dreadful condition, he recognized his remorseless enemy, Bill Wringley, and was clearly recognized by him, for, raising himself with difficulty upon his elbow, he shook his maimed and seared hand at him, and with a scowl and a hideous soundless effort to speak, fell back dead.

Horried at the hate that even such mortal agony could not abate, John sank lifeless to the ground.

Even he, indifferent as he had become to all that surrounded him, was surprised on his recovery to find himself once more in the old familiar room. A wild hope sprang up for a moment in his mind, only

to die at once. The room was as Travers had left it, not as he had known it. He was a condemned prisoner still.

A week before the day on which he was to suffer the dread penalty of the law he received a note from Mary. It expressed her sincere regret that, owing to the circumstances, she dare not, in the face of public opinion, come to see him; her firm belief in him, her intense pity for his undeserved affliction, and her fond farewell. This instance of pure though blind faith, touched him profoundly and encouraged him strangely.

The days flew quickly past, and still no sign of Rose. The evening of the thirtieth of June arrived, and he determined to no longer run the risk of waiting. He shuddered when he thought that perhaps he had overrated the easiness of the task, and contemplated with growing horror the prospect of failure. He would delay no more.

He had scarcely come to this resolution when, with the gruff announcement, "a lady to see you," the jailer ushered in a cloaked and hooded figure. No sooner had the man disappeared than the wrappings were flung aside, Rose stood before him, and with a cry flung herself into his embrace.

"Walter, dearest Walter," she sobbed.

"Rose, my own little Rose," he answered, mingling his tears and kisses with hers.

"I thought I should never be able to come," she murmured. "Oh, Walter, they are so cruel to me now."

"Poor darling, poor child," he said sadly.

"Tell me, Walter," she continued eagerly, "you did not do it, did you?"

"No, no, dearest heart, no no," he replied earnestly. "How could you think it?"

"I never did," she said, smiling proudly through her tears. "They tried to make me, but I never would."

"God bless you for that, my best beloved."

"They told me you were dead," she said irrelevantly, "and then they drove me to it. Can you forgive me?"

"Forgive you?" he cried, straining her to his heart. "But are you very unhappy?"

"Yes," she answered sobbing bitterly. "Yes. I thought I could bear it when you were gone. And then I saw you—and after that—but it is not for long, it cannot be for long, dear."

"What do you mean?" he said, but her pale, hollow cheeks and bloodless lips told him only too well.

"I am dying, Walter, dying," she said, almost joyfully. "And I am glad of it now. We shall soon be together."

Whether the jailer had forgotten them, or whether out of kindly pity he pretended to have done so, at all events he did not return, and they sat for long in the gathering twilight, forgetting everything but that they were together.

Suddenly she rose to her feet, pressing her hand to her heart, and then would have fallen, had he not caught her in his arms.

"Kiss me, Walter," she whispered, clinging feebly to him and pressing her lips to his. "Kiss me,

dearest love, I shall escape him now. I am dying. I am glad—so glad. We shall soon be together now. Do—not—forget me.”

Her lips moved soundlessly, she raised her head, kissed him once more, and with a deep sigh, sank back, lifeless in his arms.

With bitter tears he laid her gently and reverently on the ground, and with a single parting kiss upon the cold still face he set himself once more to his task. The last frail tie that bound him was broken now.

For many agonizing minutes all his efforts were in vain. What if he should fail now after all? The thought was appalling. The next morning would see him, all guiltless as he was, led to a horrible and ignominious death, a murderer's doom. He must get some hold upon his old lost life. In his mental agony he called upon the one true spirit he had known of old. If he still lived in any memory it was in his.

“Come to me—Come to me—Come to me,” he cried again and again, not aloud, but in his inmost soul.

And then it seemed as if a faint far voice came ringing down the boundless halls of time in answer to his cry.

Clearer and more clear, the old life came back to him, the old familiar room, his dearest friend. He seemed uplifted in space, his head swam, till with a profound sigh he fell senseless by the body of the dead girl.

He awoke once more, and shuddered to see the same room before him. He felt dizzy and confused,

his sight was dim and misty. The same room! Was it the same? No, surely it was different. It was not as Travers had known it, and yet it was not as he had known it either. The books and smaller ornaments were none of his.

Presently his eye fell upon the clothes he wore. They were strange and yet familiar. Suddenly his memory returned. They had been his of old. He felt them, they were real. He raised his eyes, full of a new-grown hope and saw a well-known, well-loved figure standing before him.

With a cry of joy he rose and fell forward into the arms of his best, his long lost friend. He was free from all his troubles and dangers—safe—safe at home at last.

Postscript, by the Editor.

One week after the manuscript was completed, in the last days of September, John Stuart passed peacefully away in my arms.

He never recovered from the sufferings he had gone through. The doctor who attended him could discover no actual disease, and was consequently unable to do anything to relieve, or save him. It was, he said, a kind of decline, brought on by mental suffering; a general break up of the system for which there was no remedy. He suffered no pain, but gradually faded away.

I was sitting by his bedside, the last sad evening, in the fading, light when he raised himself suddenly, and said:

“Take me in your arms, old fellow, I am going.”

He lay for some time, his head on my shoulder, breathing as gently as a child, and I could scarcely believe that he was as bad as he thought.

“Don’t cry for me, old boy,” he said softly, for I am not ashamed to own that my tears were running fast. “I am only glad. It is better so.”

For a long time we sat so, in the gathering gloom, for he would not let me get a light.

Occasionally he would murmur a few words of comfort, or consolation to me. In his last moments he was as unselfish, and as thoughtful for others, as I had always known him.

“That story,” he said presently. “Don’t give it to the world until I have been long dead. I don’t want the curious to come staring and doubting at my grave.”

I promised faithfully, and he was silent once more.

At length he sat up suddenly, and stretching out his arms, cried twice :

“Rose, darling, I am coming !”

Then, with a deep sigh, he sank back into my arms, and died without a struggle.

So I lost the best friend I ever knew. I am getting on in years now, but in the whole thirty-four that have passed since then, I have never met his like, and never expect to.

THE END.

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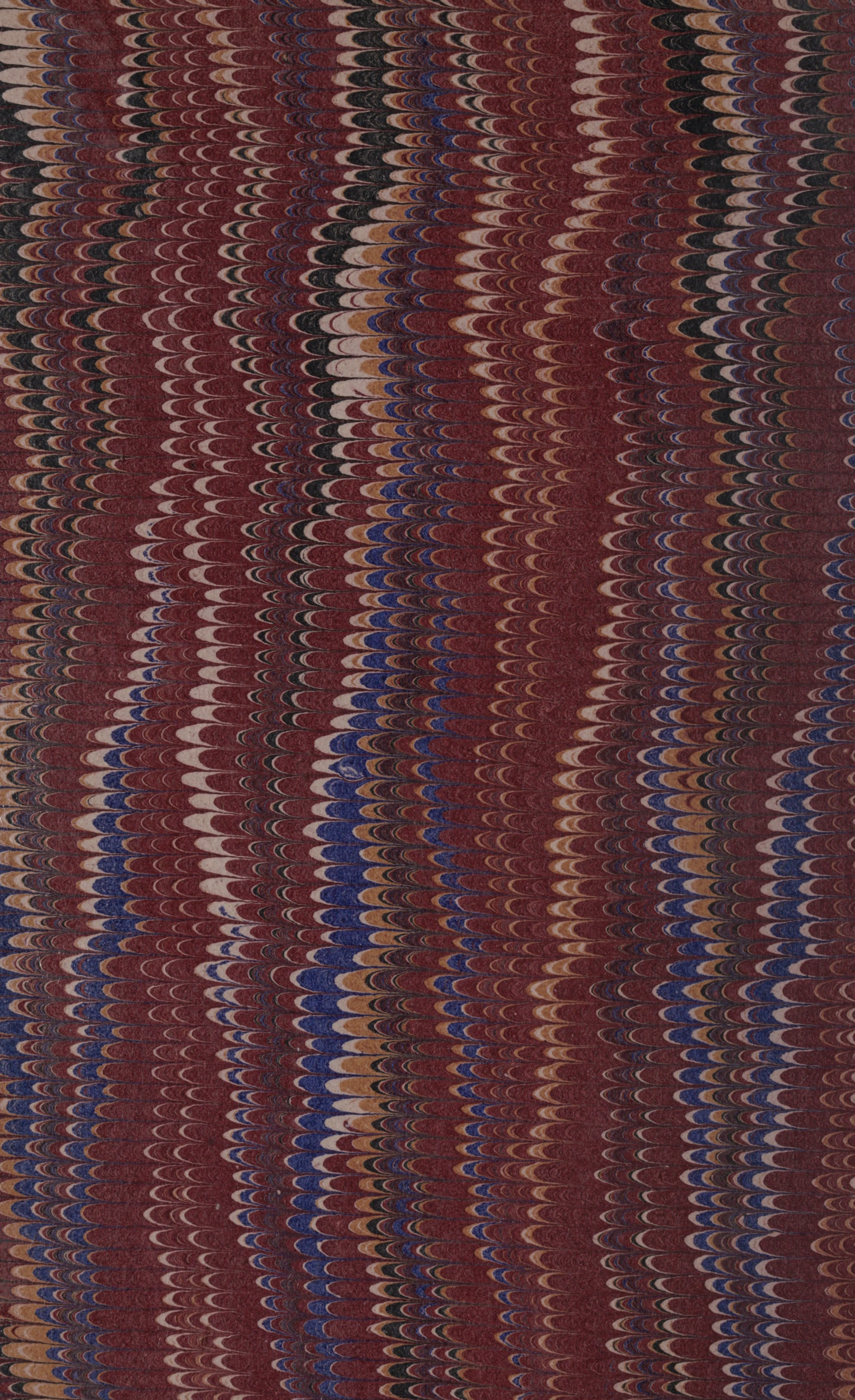
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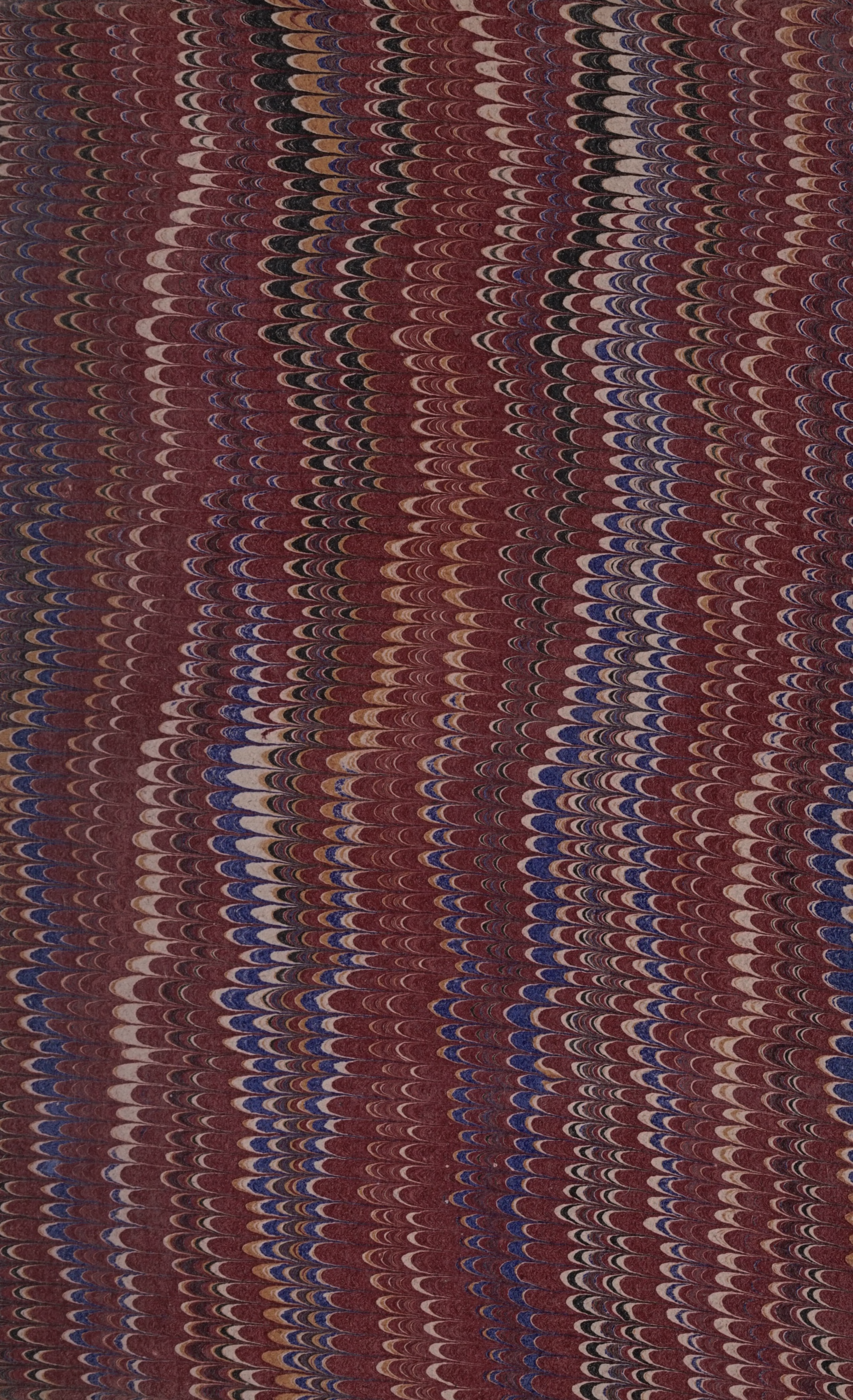
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